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GRANTLEY MANOR.

A TALE.



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# GRANTLEY MANOR.

A TALE.

BY

LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON,

AUTHOR OF "ELLEN MIDDLETON."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# GRANTLEY MANOR.

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## CHAPTER IX.

THE next day but one was Sunday ; Ginevra had gone early to the Catholic chapel at Marston, and only returned after the vesper service. It was getting dark when she reached home, and after hastily kissing her father and her sister, she shut herself up in her own room. At the usual hour that they sat together before dressing time, Margaret glided in, took her place on the low stool by the fire, and began playing unconsciously with the beads of her sister's rosary, while Ginevra, drawing some white and pink camellias from a

straw basket at her feet, arranged them in a wreath.

“You see I did not forget my visit to the green-house,” she said, while proceeding with her task: “I mean this wreath to be my *chef d’œuvre*. What have you been doing to-day, Margaret?—since church, I mean.”

“O nothing,” said Margaret; “we generally take a long walk in the afternoon when there is no service, but everybody objected. Walter was lame again, and Edmund Neville cross. I cannot conceive what put him out. He was in such spirits yesterday, and to-day he has been looking as black as thunder, and hardly spoke to any one. I do not like people to have such uncertain tempers! Do you, Ginevra?”

“No,” said her sister gently; “but in this perplexing world, dear Margaret, it is hard to tell whether it is suffering or temper that clouds the brow, and oppresses the heart. To be always



calm is to *some* impossible, to *all* difficult," she added, while a scarcely perceptible sigh escaped her.

"I believe you are the most perfect person in the world," exclaimed Margaret, raising her eyes from the fire to her sister's face, which was paler than usual.

Ginevra started, and laying her hand on Margaret's mouth, said eagerly, "Never say that again, dearest;" and while she placed the last bright flower among the shining leaves, she continued, "and never judge hastily; never condemn harshly, but remember how little you know of life, and of its trials. May you never meet with any but what God sends you! May you never make any for yourself, for such are the hardest to bear! Pray for those who suffer. They may be sorrowing saints—they may be repenting sinners; but if they suffer, you cannot do amiss in praying for them. They need it so much. There

now, let me put this flowery crown on your head. I have made you thoughtful with my sermon, but lay it to heart, my sweet sister ; learn to weep with those who weep, and may others never have but to rejoice with you ! ”

When the sisters met again in the dining-room, Edmund was seated next to Margaret. He, at first, seemed unable to rally his spirits, but by degrees he grew excited, and his gaiety, which was usually quiet, was almost boisterous. This continued in the evening ; and, in the course of conversation, he began talking again of Darrell-court, and pressed Margaret to go there the next day. She turned to Ginevra, and asked her if she would like it ; and was rather disappointed when she answered coldly, that Mrs. Warren wished to see the place again, and would, she knew, gladly accompany her.

“ Are you quite determined to settle there ? ” asked Walter in a moment.

“*That*,” replied Neville, “depends on circumstances over which I have no control. I am in the hands of others, and on their decision turns the happiness or misery of my life.”

He said this with a flushed cheek and a hurried manner, and his words produced an instantaneous effect on his three hearers. Walter turned pale, for he saw before him the crisis he had so long anticipated; and Margaret felt her heart beat with joyful emotion as she now foresaw, that in the home of his ancestors, in his own future abode, he would open his heart to her, and claim the acknowledgment of her love in return for the avowal of his. She glanced timidly at Ginevra, and perceived that her cheek, her brow, and even her temples, to the very roots of her hair, were suffused with a deep blush, which proved that she, too, must have seized the allusion, and how clear its import must have appeared to her. Recovering herself from her agitation, Margaret

proposed to go and consult Mrs. Thornton and her father on the intended expedition, and Edmund eagerly urged her to do so.

“Mind you succeed in arranging it,” he exclaimed, as she rose from her place. “You know I cannot bear to be thwarted, and will *never* forgive you if your negotiation fails. I have so much for you all to do at Darrell-court. You, Walter, must undertake the chapel.”

“And what do you intrust to me?” said Mr. Warren, who had joined them.

“The dining-room and the picture-gallery.”

“And to me?” said Margaret, who was lingering at the door of the music-room.

“The flower-garden, or the breakfast-room.”

“And to my sister?”

Edmund turned, and trying to catch Ginevra’s eye, said gravely—

“Will she choose for herself?”

But as she did not answer, he addressed him-

self to Walter, and begged him to show Mr. Warren the engravings in the library, from which he was to select a design for a new window in the chapel of Darrell-court.

“My uncle,” he said, “is not, I believe, much of an ecclesiologist, but he is a good judge of anything connected with art.”

Mr. Warren, with a manner that implied that he would do the designs the honour of looking at them, followed Walter into the library. Margaret, in the meanwhile, went up to the whist-table, and while Mrs. Sydney was dealing very slowly, she explained her plan for the next day, or rather announced it. She met with no opposition ; only Mrs. Thornton assured her, with a sigh, that she had herself become a mere nothing in the family ; that she was at the mercy of everybody, and washed her hands of it. Of *what* she washed them would have been difficult to find out ; but she repeated the expression energetically two or

three times, and then applied herself to the sorting of her cards.

“So you are going to help Mr. Neville to take possession of Darrell-court,” whispered Mr. Thornton, so audibly that Mrs. Sydney started and mis-dealt; “and what if he was to ask you to do so for good—what should you say to that, Miss Margaret?”

“Nonsense, grandpapa! what very odd ideas come into your head!”

“Which never by any chance come into your’s, Meg—heigh?” A kiss on his mouth was his grand-daughter’s answer, and she hurried away in search of Colonel Leslie.

Later in the evening, as she was sitting by Walter in the library, Ginevra joined them. Suddenly Margaret recollected that she had not given Edmund an answer about the next day’s proceedings, and, not sorry to have a good excuse for returning to the drawing-room, she left Walter



and her sister alone together. He raised his eyes from the portfolio he had been examining, and they met those of the young girl who was sitting opposite to him. He had felt an increasing interest about her during the last few days. Like most reserved persons, he had a quick insight into human feelings, and having often suffered in silence himself, he easily detected the marks of silent suffering in others. That she was unhappy *now* he could no longer doubt. He had sometimes fancied before that her eyes had filled with tears, which a firm resolution had alone restrained from flowing, but now he saw them stealing down her cheek faster than her hand could brush them away. He addressed to her some trifling observation, and her mouth quivered when she attempted to reply. There was not a shade of temper in her face ; but it was evident that she was struggling with a powerful emotion, and steadily endeavouring to subdue it. Walter's

prejudices would not have been easily conquered, had this young girl appeared happy, or had she, on her arrival among them, displayed a childish or ungracious sorrow ; but as it was, she was suffering, and she was struggling. The source of that suffering he knew not ; where she found strength to struggle he discerned not yet ; but he longed to soothe that pain, and to help those efforts, as he would have longed to feed the hungry or to shelter the naked. He pushed the portfolio towards her, and said—

“ Have you seen these engravings ? ”

She looked at them at first in silence ; but by degrees grew interested, and then animated. A print of St. Peter’s Martyrdom seemed to fix her attention ; she said, in a low voice, as her head was bent over it—

“ He must have known he was forgiven *then*—his long penitence accepted—his trial ended ! His sufferings must have been to him a pledge of pardon.”

In general Ginevra was not perfectly at home in English; but when the subject incited her, she was eloquent in a manner peculiar to herself. Her language was picturesque, and she spoke as others write, but with a simplicity that took away from her *conversation* all appearance of effort or affectation. There was something in the tone of her observations which harmonised with the secret impressions of Walter's hidden life—that life of the soul which holds its deep and silent course apart from all outward converse with the world, or even from the most intimate associations of our homes and hearts. The writings of past generations, the solitary studies of years, his instinctive yearnings after a deeper faith and a wider sympathy than his own religious education or his own times afforded, had prepared him to feel for the young Italian, and he was listening to her original thoughts clothed in eloquent and expressive language, with an interest mingled with curiosity, when he perceived that she suddenly checked her-

self, and turning round, he saw Edmund Neville enter the room, and approach the table where they were sitting. He took up one of the illuminated sketches, and carelessly inquired if that was the design for his chapel.

“It is the one I had fixed upon,” replied Walter. Are you going to Darrell-court to-morrow?”

“I believe Miss Leslie has arranged it. Has the Signora Ginevra made up her mind to accompany us?” he added in a low voice, as he rapidly turned over the leaves of a book he had seized hold of.

“Why should not you go?” said Walter, seeing that she made no answer to Neville.

“Because I have not strength for it,” she replied slowly, as if it cost her an effort to speak.

“Are you ill?” he exclaimed; “I am sure you are ill. Shall I get you some water?”

She nodded assent, and he rushed to the door, almost knocking down two tables on his way. When he returned a few minutes afterwards,

with a glass of water in his hand, he found Ginevra alone; she was standing by the table, and he thought she trembled as she extended her hand to take the glass; she raised it to her lips and tried to drink, but not succeeding, put it down, turned to walk away, and then sat down as if unable to cross the room.

“I shall call your sister,” said Walter.

She shook her head, laid her hand on his arm to detain him, gasped for breath, and then burst into an agony of tears. Walter took her hand, and said in a serious manner—

“Ginevra Leslie, you are very unhappy. How shall you bear to live among strangers, and never to open your heart to any one?”

She made a strong effort, subdued the nervous agitation that had overcome her, and answered calmly—

“I have given way before you. Do not take advantage of my weakness. Do not tell my father

and my sister of this uncontrollable emotion. It was sudden, but you see it is short."

"But there is a *cause*," said Walter, "and a deep one."

"O, have we not all of us," she exclaimed, "a well-spring of suffering in our hearts which we keep down with a strong hand, and which we master with a strong will?"

"Do not trust too much to your strength," said Walter, as he saw the paleness which again spread over her face.

"I would not," she said earnestly—"I would not if it were my own strength, but God gives it, and He will not withdraw it, though sometimes my own heart rises against me with such violence that I quail before it."

"I have seen you for a few days, and scarcely knew you an hour ago, but I would fain serve you. May I?—can I?"

"Mr. Sydney," said Ginevra, and she took both



his hands in hers, "you have been very kind to me to-day ; and I do not regret," she stopped a moment and then went on—"I do not regret that you have seen me thus agitated—thus disturbed—you will not think hardly of me—I know you will not."

Her voice faltered, and Walter interrupted her.

"It is so natural that you should feel depressed—you are so very young. Everything here must appear strange to you ; and you have had afflictions," he added still more gently, and glancing at her black dress ; "and some of those you love, though not taken from you by death, are far away, and you would fain see them again—you would fain see your own home and speak your own tongue again."

She raised her pale but most expressive eyes to his face, and said, slowly—

"There is one at whose feet I should wish to

kneel, once again, before I die ; but he is not where my home was. It is my mother's uncle," she continued, as Walter looked at her inquiringly, " Father Francesco ; he left Verona a year ago for a distant mission ; he grieved to leave me, but his duty called him, and he went—for how long I know not. On earth I may never see him again—and yet I think I shall—not now, not soon—but once more in my life. It is when the agony deepens, and the shades darken, that angels are sent to us. Perhaps," she continued, with increasing emotion, " perhaps he will come to me when my strength is failing, and evil is waxing strong, and hope is forsaking me—perhaps God will send him to say to me, ' O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt ? ' "

She hid her face in her hands and remained silent. Walter looked at her with inexpressible interest, but scarcely knew what to say. She seemed very unhappy ; perhaps the excess of her

grief was childish ; at least, she could have no reason for gloomy forebodings, and he tried to say so. She listened to him for some minutes without altering her position, and while he spoke of her father's love, of her sister's joy at finding her so charming and so kind, Walter grew quite eloquent. In a few moments she raised her head and smiled sweetly. The last words she uttered had brought with them the strength she needed. She had ceased to doubt. Her brow was calm and her eye was bright. Whatever was the spirit that had moved her soul erewhile, one mightier still had now gained the mastery. Whatever billows were gathering about her, she was treading them again with a firm step, and measuring them with an unshrinking eye. She rose, held out her hand to Walter, and glancing once more at the engraving which he had shown her, she said in a low voice—

“ Pray for me, that my faith may never fail me.”

The following morning Margaret woke early with her mind full of excitement at the thoughts of the projected expedition, and from her muslin-curtained bed watched with impatience the unclosing of the shutters; it was snowing heavily, and she turned towards the wall with a feeling of keen disappointment. She called to her maid, in a sleepy voice—

“Grace, have you been to my sister’s room yet?”

“Yes, Miss; half an hour ago. Miss Ginevra was up and dressed.”

“So early,” cried Margaret, with a prolonged yawn.

“Those foreigners have such queer habits,” Grace observed. “They never can do things like other people. Who ever heard of a young lady not having a maid, and dressing herself? But then, to be sure, I have heard it said that Miss Ginevra was brought up in a mean sort of way, and that her mother was not a real lady, not even in her own country.”

Margaret felt provoked at this speech, but did not exactly know how to show her displeasure. While Grace was doing her hair, she returned to the same subject.

“Mrs. Warren’s maid says that Miss Ginevra does nothing like the rest of the world, and she does not set much store by such people,—Mrs. Henderson does not. She says, they never come to much good in the end.”

“What nonsense you are talking, Grace! Of course my sister does not dress or talk exactly as we do, because she was brought up differently. It would be very odd if she was like us in everything.”

“So indeed it would, Miss, and being a Papist, too, poor thing. Mrs. Henderson says, they never slept anywhere on the road but Miss Ginevra was off to church before breakfast; but all that church-going, as Mrs. Henderson says, does not come to good at last.”

“What do you or Mrs. Henderson know about it? I dare say we should all be the better for going oftener to church. Mr. Sydney thinks so, and walks a great way off every day for daily service.”

“O but your grandpapa’s butler says, Miss, that Mr. Walter is a Papist in disguise; and Mrs. Henderson would not be at all surprised if Miss Ginevra was to talk him over into being one in good earnest. John said they was looking at them Papish books in the library last night, and they was shaking hands over them, and Miss Ginevra was crying when he went in to put coals on.”

“Shaking hands and crying? What are you talking about?” exclaimed Margaret impatiently; but at the same moment she remembered that, when going to bed the night before, she had remarked traces of tears on her sister’s face; and she felt annoyed at the idea that something had passed between her and Walter with which she



had not been made acquainted. "She treats me as a child," was her next feeling; "she kisses me, puts flowers in my hair, calls me her Reine Marguerite; but, now that I think about it, not one word has she said to me of her thoughts, of her feelings, of her past life—of herself, in short. And now, it seems, that Walter and she have been talking together in the most confidential manner—have been forming a secret friendship. I really have borne a great deal. I did not mind Mrs. Warren's saying rather rudely before me, how much papa admired her the most,—her dress, at least,—which comes to the same; and I told her she was the favourite, and that I did not mind it—and I do not mind it; but if Walter and she are to have long *tête-à-têtes*, and I am to be neglected by everybody—"

Grace, who had been too busily engaged with some of her professional duties to speak during the last few minutes, now began again—

“Mrs. Henderson can’t think how her lady came to allow Miss Ginevra to walk out by herself, as she did, abroad, and not to wear a bonnet on, too. She says it gave her quite a turn the first day she saw her in the street, dressed in that queer fashion. It’s so very unbecoming and bold like.”

“Not when it is the custom,” said Margaret, impatiently.

“Oh no, to be sure, Miss, it is all custom ; and many foreign customs we shall have to put up with here, no doubt ; perhaps we may all have to walk out without our bonnets soon, for they say the Colonel is so partial to Miss Ginevra, that she will have everything her own way before long.”

Margaret’s cheek was very much flushed at that moment ; whether it was that she was stooping over the fire lacing a very tight boot, or that her pride was stung to the quick at finding that her father’s preference for her sister was noticed

and commented upon even by the household. In a voice that betrayed irritation, she replied—

“I really must request, Grace, that you do not make remarks of that sort in future. They are unbecoming in you, and very disagreeable to me.”

Grace, who was about the same age as her mistress, and nearly as much spoiled, had no notion of being snubbed in this manner, and began to justify herself in a tone of mingled anger and plaintiveness.

“Indeed, Miss, as to making any disagreeable remarks, it is the last thing I ever think of doing ; but I am much attached to you, and I have been many years in the family, and I cannot bear to think of your being put upon or cut out in any way ; and when I heard it said you would be put on the shelf, and your youngest sister, a foreigner and a Papist, too, be set up above us all, it went hard with me.”

“You really forget yourself, Grace,” interrupted

Margaret, indignantly. "I cannot suffer such things to be said to me."

"Very well, Miss; very well;" murmured Grace, with a look of much resignation. "I will not say another word; no, not if the grass was to be cut from under your feet, or the very bed taken from under you; no, not if Miss Ginevra was to set her cap at Mr. Neville, which she is very likely to do—for Mrs. Henderson says there never was a gentleman yet she did not make fall in love with her; and she was walking home with him yesterday: when they passed before the woodman's cottage, and when they came near to the park gate, she turned one way, and he another; but I don't care; it does not signify. I won't say another word, though she were to be married before you, and you had to be her bridesmaid."

At this climax Grace burst into tears, and Margaret desired her to leave the room.

Her pensive and troubled countenance as she leant against the chimney after dismissing her maid, showed the restless workings of her mind. She brooded over her words, and called to mind divers trifling circumstances which had occurred during the last few days, with an anxious desire to define or to dissipate the vague suspicions which were crowding into her troubled imagination. Her thoughts ran to and fro, as she rapidly paced her little room, and now and then resumed her previous attitude. "Was it, indeed," she thought, "a true presentiment that cast such a dark shade over the days that preceded Ginevra's arrival? Has she come with her strange beauty, with her smooth tongue, with the magic of her genius and her resistless captivation, to steal away from me the heart of Edmund Neville? Was it to him that she addressed, on the night of his arrival, that strain of impassioned harmony which seemed to draw him to her side, and to fill his

soul with indescribable emotion? She met him yesterday, and spent in his society the very hours in which I wandered alone in silent disappointment; and afterwards she spoke honied words to me, and crowned me with flowers, and affectedly disclaimed my praises. But then what will follow? What will happen? What can I do? How can I compete with her? I cannot smile, or sing, or talk, like Ginevra; I cannot look like an angel and act all the time a cruel and deceitful part. Is it not hard that she should snatch away from me my cup of hope and of happiness, and wring my heart with anguish, which I must bear in secret! for none must know—(here the poor child's grief found vent in tears)—none must know how I have loved him, how I love him every day more devotedly; but they will know—they have seen—how Walter will pity me!—(now a burning blush covered her cheeks); and grandpapa, who was saying yesterday—but it is impossible; I think I

must be dreaming or mad to suppose it. He has but just seen her ; he scarcely knows her. Three short days cannot have changed him, and destroyed all my happiness. Her heart is calm and free ; mine is throbbing as if it would break from my breast. Shall I tell her that I love him ? O no, I am afraid of her. I cannot upbraid her, and I dare not ask her to have mercy ; and yet perhaps she would. Can it be that Edmund has confided to her that he loves me ? and that they met to speak of it yesterday ? ”

Like a flash of summer lightning on a cloudy sky, that last idea crossed the gloomy forebodings of the anxious girl, and a train of joyful anticipation followed in its track. The more she dwelt upon it, the more probable it appeared. Guileless as a child, and open as the day, she could with difficulty attribute evil motives to others ; and in the warmth of her own affection, she reckoned on theirs, and was now ready to fly to her sister’s

feet, confess her suspicions, and implore her forgiveness for having in her secret thoughts unjustly accused her. Under this impression her manner to Ginevra was still more affectionate than usual, and she endeavoured to find her alone, and to enter into conversation with her; but this was more difficult than it appeared, and without refusing to sit with her, or to talk to her, it so happened that her sister was almost always engaged in some other manner when she proposed it, and seldom left the drawing-room, where the continued snow kept most of the party prisoners. Edmund Neville proposed one morning to read out loud, and the offer was joyfully accepted by Margaret.

“Shall it be in English or in Italian?” he inquired, glancing at Ginevra, who smiled and said—

“You will make too many mistakes.”

“O no,” he replied, “I am a tolerable Italian



scholar, and your sister wishes, I know, to hear the 'Promessi Sposi.' Don't you, Margaret?"

She said "Yes" rather coldly, for he had opened the book, and changing his place beside her for one on the sofa where Ginevra was sitting, he turned to her with that peculiar expression which now and then gave softness to his piercing eyes, and said,

"Stop me when I make some great fault, but do not be *too severe*."

She gently shook her head, lifted for an instant her dark eyelashes, and bent upon him a glance of such indescribable tenderness, that Margaret felt her hopes die away, and her fears return with renewed bitterness. During the two hours that followed, the sisters seemed for a while to have exchanged positions and characters. Margaret sat listening to the voice of the man she loved. But, melodious as it was, in her ears the sweetness of its tone had vanished. Silent and gloomy,

but rivetted to the spot as by some spell, she heard him read the beautiful opening description of Manzoni's incomparable novel; and when she laughed at the inimitable account of Don Abbondio's meeting with the bravoës, there was a nervous expression in her face, and a painful quivering about her mouth. On the other hand, it seemed as if the reserve and the composure of Ginevra's usual manner had given way for a while to an animated interest—to a sympathetic excitement. Her eyes, usually fixed on her work even when conversing with others, were now raised sometimes to Neville's face, sometimes on the broad snowy landscape without; her hands, usually so busily employed, were now resting, one on the back of the couch, and the other on her breast, while she clasped the velvet ribbon that bound her neck. She seemed to breathe more freely than usual, to laugh more carelessly, to have given her spirit a holiday. Sometimes

she took the book from Neville, and read a few sentences herself, or, leaning over his shoulder, she imitated the Milanese accent while pronouncing Agnese's enchanting *naïvetés*, or Renzo's charming rusticities; and once, as she was uttering with admirable grace and feeling the following words: "Ma il pensiero di Lucia quanti pensieri traeva seco! Tante speranze! Tante promesse! Un avvenire così vagheggiato, cosio tenuto sicuro! e quel giorno così sospirato!" he turned his face towards her—their eyes met, her fair hair almost touched his dark locks,—and even when she had ceased to speak he seemed still to listen, and she to repeat in the silent language of her eyes, what her lips had just uttered. Turn by turn they read, and Margaret watched; each moment seemed an age—each moment she was on the point of starting up indignantly — of leaving them abruptly. They seemed to forget her presence, almost her exist-

ence ; she ceased to attend, or to follow the sense of the words. Her thoughts were no longer with Manzoni's creations ; they had reverted to that wild and unfinished poem, that strange Christabel, which had already haunted her mind and disturbed her imagination. She felt as if a spell was upon her—as if she, too, had seen in that hour what no one else had seen, what no one else would ever believe, what she dared not describe, what she scarcely comprehended ; but this she felt, that her hopes, her joy, her happiness, were conjured away from her grasp in some irresistible manner ; they were escaping from her hold, they were dying away ; and to all but herself it seemed the simplest thing in the world that it should be so—no one would resent it, or even observe it. Those lips would continue to utter their “dulcet and harmonious sounds ;” those eyes would speak or feign a love more ardent and bewitching than her own dared to reveal ;

that pale cheek would bloom in his presence, and every glance and every gesture tell a tale of passion; while her own childish glee, her own trembling hopes, would wither in the shade like a rose plucked from its stem before the sun has shone upon it, or the morning of life passed away. The scene was sadly changed; the Spirit of mistrust had breathed as he passed on every flower in her path. Like a garden which, on the day of the year's first frost, shows black and shrivelled leaves, where a few hours before bloomed an earthly paradise, so the sweet affections and the kindly sympathies that swayed poor Margaret's heart erewhile were blighted, drooping, perhaps expiring. For the first time in her life she maintained a gloomy silence, while Jealousy and Hatred, those terrific visitors of the soul, hovered in the distance, in dim and shadowy forms, and whispered in her trembling ears their first dark suggestions—their first foul suspicions. And this lasted—this silent

drama unfolded itself—this deepening mystery ran its course—till at the end of about two hours the doors were thrown open, and Lady Donnington and Miss Vincent were announced.

## CHAPTER X.

MARGARET started from her chair, and rushed to meet her visitors. She scarcely knew whether their arrival gave her pain or pleasure; but she was glad of anything that changed for the moment a state of feeling that was becoming too acutely painful. Maud kissed her affectionately, and then her eyes wandered in search of Ginevra, who was at that moment advancing towards them. She coldly offered her hand to her, and Margaret perceived with astonishment that a crimson blush had covered her sister's face, and that she seemed to shrink from the piercing glance that Maud turned upon her. Her embarrassment was so visible, that Margaret felt its influence, and also coloured. Maud seemed to enjoy the evident

confusion which her presence occasioned, and said a few words about renewing her acquaintance with Miss Leslie, and the manner in which it brought back to her mind their meetings at Genoa. Lady Donnington was so engaged at first in inquiries after every member of Edmund Neville's family, (for she was civil, as other people are literary, or professional, or scientific—it was the business—the enjoyment—the sum total of her existence,) that she had no time to bestow on Ginevra; but in the midst of her concern for a second cousin of Mrs. Warren's, who had had the scarlatina, she suddenly recollected her Italian acquaintance, and shook hands with her repeatedly; but at the same time, with a sort of deprecating sigh, and smothered ejaculation, which seemed to apologise at once for not having seen her before, and for being glad to see her then.

A few words of general conversation passed, and then luncheon was announced, and the whole



party moved to the dining-room. Maud watched, like a lynx, every turn of Margaret's countenance, and soon perceived that she was ill at ease, and that her efforts at conversation were not successful. She directed her glances alternately on her, on Ginevra, and on Edmund; and an expression of awakened interest, like that of a dog who has just caught the scent, seemed to sharpen her features and brighten her eyes. As soon as she could escape from the dining-room, she seized Margaret's arm, and led her gently, but forcibly, across the drawing-room into the library, and then into the corner of the remotest couch. When she had fixed her there, she said in a low, impressive, and inquiring tone—

“ Well ? ”

“ Well, I am very glad to see you, Maud; I was afraid the weather was so bad you would not come.”

“ Are you going to talk to me of the weather ? ”

Maud answered in a tone that was half playful and half impatient; "have you nothing more interesting to tell me?"

"What?—what do you mean?"

"Are you not about to inform me that of all the captivating creatures in the world, your sister is the most irresistible. I am quite prepared for it, I assure you. I hear you are all mad about her; that your father says she is an angel; that Mr. Sydney calls her a saint; and that we shall not have a chance any of us of being even looked at, much less thought of, by anybody, as long as the fair Ginevra remains among us."

"She is very charming," Margaret answered; and there was such a sad tone in her voice as she pronounced the word, that Maud ventured to say, in a manner that might have passed for a mere joke and innocent inquiry,

"Then you have had nothing as yet but the *patte de velours*? You are quite *sous le charme*, I suppose?"

Margaret, like all frank people, detested a hint ; and being, moreover, predisposed at that moment to irritation, exclaimed warmly—

“Why really, Maud, I wish you would speak out, or not speak at all. What is the use of beating about the bush, and putting unpleasant ideas into my head, for the sole purpose of plaguing me ? As they tell people in the marriage-service, do say what you have to say at once, or ‘for ever hold your peace.’”

“O, you have been studying that part of the prayer-book lately ? Are you perfect in the responses, and prepared to say, ‘I, Margaret, take thee, Edmund—’”

“Far from it,” exclaimed Margaret, with impetuosity ; “there is no question of my marrying Mr. Neville.”

“The question may not yet have been asked, but it does not follow that it will not,” said Maud, “unless ——”

“Unless what ?” cried Margaret, whose interest

in the subject got the better at once of her caution and of her irritation.

“ Unless,” said Maud, “ the game should be taken out of your hands, my dear unsuspecting, confiding Margaret, and your *young* and *artless* sister should employ her talents and her charms in that direction. Do not turn away from me, do not look so angry with me. Now, Margaret, do be reasonable. What possible interest can I have in putting you on your guard, except that of saving you from the wretched position of a dupe? I know more of the world than you do, and I also know more, I am sorry to say it, of the character and of the artifices of a coquette, and of the unrelenting manner in which a woman of that description will pursue her object, and gain her end.”

“ Ginevra cannot be a coquette,” Margaret answered, in a hesitating manner. “ She is so good, so affectionate, so modest,—at least, I think ——— I hope so.”

“ You do not feel sure of it, Margaret—you, who have seen nothing to the contrary; but watch her—remember my advice—*watch her*. I could tell you much on this subject, but I prefer leaving you to your own observations.”

“ You know more of foreigners than I do, Maud,” said Margaret thoughtfully; “ I suppose their manners and ways are always very different from ours.”

“ In what respect? Cannot you give me an instance of what you mean?”

“ I mean that what would not be modest or becoming in an English girl, might, from different habits and customs, be quite natural and proper in a foreigner.”

“ Why, in married women that might be the case, perhaps; but young ladies abroad are particularly demure, and silent, and proper, and all that sort of thing.”

“ Well, so she is in some ways, but ——”

“ But she would not mind walking alone with a gentleman, or writing to him in secret, or ——”

As Maud said these words, she carefully watched her companion's countenance, and almost started herself at Margaret's sudden exclamation,

“ O Maud ! how did you know—how did you guess ? ”

A look of amused exultation danced in her eyes ; and she, in her turn, exclaimed—

“ What ! I *have* guessed, have I ? *You* have had a specimen of your sister's way of going on ! and you have been keeping it to yourself all this time, and only sighing deeply over her many attractions. She has corrupted you already, Margaret, for you would never have been so hypocritical six months ago ? ”

Margaret coloured deeply at this taunt, and answered with some warmth—

“ It is not fair, Maud, to take the words out of my mouth—to cross-question me in this way, and

then accuse me of hypocrisy, because I am unwilling to think ill of my sister, or to say what may prejudice others against her."

"O, as to that, my dear child, you need have no scruples; what you can tell me, will only be the simple sequel of what, with my own eyes, I have seen."

"What *do* you mean, Maud? Oh, pray speak out at last, and let me know the worst. You have said too much now to draw back, and you must tell me all you know."

"Well," returned Maud, drawing her lips together, and playing with the trinkets of her chate-laine, "I suppose I am now absolved from my foolish promise to Lucy, not to set you against your sister till you had yourself seen reason to conceive doubts or suspicions about her."

"Oh! I never said I had, Maud. Heaven forbid it; that would be too dreadful!"

"Then what is it you *did* say?" retorted

Maud, impatiently; "do not let us go on for ever beating about the bush. What have you seen or heard of your sister that made you ask me that question about foreigners just now, and then, when I spoke of walking alone with a gentleman, made you exclaim, 'O, Maud, how did you know?' Margaret, you had better at once tell me the truth, or I shall suspect something worse, perhaps."

"O no! you must not, indeed; and, perhaps, it was all accidental, and my foolish fancy; but, as you say, I had better tell you the simple truth; but I am very sorry now I ever alluded to it at all. She walked home from chapel last Sunday alone with Mr. Neville, and never said anything to me about it."

"And you are jealous?" said Maud, with a provoking smile.

Margaret coloured, and replied, in a tone of irritation—



“I dislike the appearance of a mystery—that is all; and Ginevra’s manner is so unequal, sometimes so very retired, and at other times not quite exactly what—what I like; I may remark that, without being jealous, as you call it.”

“Oh, certainly; and I am glad to hear that you are *not* jealous, for I have not a doubt that your sister has quite made up her mind to captivate Mr. Neville; and with all your beauty and your attractions, you have not a chance with such a thorough-paced coquette as this charming Ginevra. There is only one way of counteracting her devices:—perhaps, if Mr. Neville’s eyes were opened to her real character, contempt might guard him against her attractions.”

“Contempt!” repeated Margaret; “it would not be easy to despise Ginevra. Oh, Maud, even while I say there is something about her which puzzles me, and causes a sort of vague suspicion to dart through my mind, I am angry with myself

for having felt it, and still more for having owned it ; perhaps she is an angel of goodness, and I— oh I sometimes think myself too wicked for having had such thoughts.”

Poor Margaret looked very unhappy, and it was with a real feeling of interest that Maud Vincent took her hand, and looked into her face as she replied,

“ My dear girl, do not add to your distress by unnecessary self-reproaches. You have only vaguely discerned in your sister’s manner and conduct what *must* be repugnant to your own sense of right, and what *I* have known long ago was the case. I have had the most unequivocal evidence of the extraordinary contrasts between her apparent reserve and her real character.”

Margaret started, and looked anxiously at her companion.

“ You know already,” continued Maud, “ that we were at Genoa at the same time she was, and

that we saw a great deal of her. *I* never liked her from the first; there was something so cold and uncertain in her manner, and she never seemed at her ease with me; but Lucy took one of her violent *engouements* for her, and *I* never heard anything from morning to night but praises of Ginevra Leslie, and exclamations about her beauty, her goodness, and her talents. They used to read together, and walk together, and Lucy, who had always had rather a fancy for Catholicism, was quite taken up with her new friend, and went with her to convents, and hospitals, and churches, and found out, *accidentally*, all sorts of beautiful traits of charity and self-denial which this wonderful model of perfection practised in secret. *I* hid my diminished head, and began to feel rather ashamed of my prejudice against her; when, alas! for Lucy and her idol, *I* too made a discovery of secret doings of a very different character. One morning that Frederic

and I had walked out before breakfast, we passed before the church of the Capuchins, and, attracted by the music, we went in, and standing near a column, watched the service for a few minutes. Among the poorer people who were kneeling before the altar, was your sister ; and certainly, I never saw any one *appear* more devout than she did. She seemed to pray with her whole heart and soul, and while the beads glided through her fingers, her eyes were fixed with an intensity of supplication I never saw in any eyes before, on the crucifix over the altar. I could not take my eyes off her, and I observed her do a very kind thing during that service. There was a little girl kneeling by her on the cold marble, (for there were neither chairs nor benches within reach), who looked very ill and weak, and leaned against her for support ; I felt touched, I own, when I saw your sister, instead of shrinking from the dirty little creature, take her in her arms, and hold her there during

the rest of the mass, while she remained kneeling herself, and her attitude was so beautiful, that I was not surprised when Frederic touched my arm, and pointed to her and then to a picture of the Virgin and Child, which hung near us, and whispered, 'How like !' As we came out, Frederic said to me, 'Do let us ask Miss Leslie to breakfast with us ; it will please Lucy so much.' I made no objection, and we accordingly went up to her as she was coming down the steps, and proposed that she should return home with us. She thanked me, but declined with that gentle manner, and that peculiar smile which you know so well, and which is always to me so suspicious ; I cannot bear people who *never* look cross or angry. Well, Fred. persisted in pressing her to come, and she still refused, without assigning any reason. At last, she said something about being expected at home, and looked quite uncomfortable when Fred. (with, I own, not exquisite tact)

kept on urging the point. At last, she wished us good-bye in a decisive manner, and left us. Well, instead of going straight home, as we had intended to do, we extended our walk towards the Acqua Sola. It so happened, that when we reached the Villa Negri I missed my bracelet, and supposing that I must have dropped it either in or just outside the church, we turned back, and retraced our steps. As we passed through one of the trellised alleys of the Acqua Sola, who should I see through the vine branches which separated us from the little fountain gardens on our left, but Ginevra, seated on a bench, not very far from us, in earnest conversation with a man whose back was turned to me. Frederic wanted to hurry on, but I confess to you that curiosity, and a feeling stronger than curiosity, rooted me to the spot. I had been persuaded all along that that extraordinary perfection which was lauded before me from morning to night, was not quite so consistent as my family

wished to make out, and I was not sorry that Frederic, who had always joined with Lucy in exclaiming against my ill-nature whenever I had given a hint of the sort, should have ocular demonstration that the reserve and modesty they had so much extolled was not *always* at least, the order of the day. My dear Margaret, I hardly like to distress you by telling you the whole truth, but as I have said so much, I had better keep nothing from you; and after all, anything is better than to be deceived. Not only did I see Ginevra look up into her companion's face with an expression of countenance that left no doubt as to the nature of their conversation, but I also saw that her hand was clasped in his, and he frequently pressed it to his lips; and that before they parted, which they did an instant afterwards, with some precipitation, he put his arm round her waist and kissed her repeatedly. He darted away in one direction, with his hat slouched over

his face, so that I could not discern his features. She remained an instant apparently absorbed in thought, and then starting up from her seat, walked rapidly towards the steps of the *Acqua Sola*. At the end of the alley she came in sight of us. She turned as pale as death, and hurried on without speaking or looking towards us. Since that day we heard several things about her which served to confirm the impression which this incident had produced upon us. She was known to carry on a secret correspondence, and to have resorted to various expedients for concealing the letters she received, and those she sent, from Mrs. Warren's observation. There were some very bad stories about her, but as I cannot vouch for their truth, I will not pain you by repeating them; mamma begged us to avoid as much as possible any intimacy with her, and a short time afterwards we left Genoa."

Margaret, who had listened to this long account



without speaking, and with a contracted brow and flushed cheek, suggested, that although what Maud had *accidentally* seen (she laid a slightly ironical stress on the word) was shocking and painful in the extreme, still, she felt inclined to hope that her sister was attached to an Italian, and one perhaps whom she might have known from childhood; and that, in that case, however blameable her conduct might have been in carrying on a clandestine intercourse, it would, perhaps, admit of some excuse. Maud looked very incredulous, and adverted to some circumstances which militated, in her opinion, against this charitable supposition, and ended by saying,

“ Well, my dear Margaret, if you have seen nothing in your sister’s manners and conduct which you dislike or disapprove, ‘ Mettez que je n’ai rien dit,’ as French people say. I do not wish to force you to concur in my unalterable opinion on the subject; of course, if Ginevra is

attached to an Italian lover, there can be no fear of her endeavouring to gain the affections of any one else."

"But," exclaimed Margaret with impatience, (for she felt the full force of Maud's insinuations), "but can she really be a miserable hypocrite? Does she feign to serve God, to love goodness, to honour virtue? Is there no reality in her faith, in her piety, in her affections? O, Maud, she cannot be so disgustingly wicked!"

"My dear child, it does not follow because your sister is a coquette, and, as I sometimes think, more than a coquette, that she absolutely feigns the sentiments she seems at times to possess. I dare say she has a sort of half scenic, half romantic religion, which is very common among Catholics, and which has nothing to do with morality, and I have no doubt that she is very good to the poor, and all that sort of thing; but her religion teaches that you can make up

for every kind of sin by good works of an easy description, and that if you confess and get absolution, you may feel quite satisfied, and go on just as before; so you see that Catholics can be very religious and very immoral at the same time, without being exactly hypocrites."

"I see," said Margaret, thoughtfully; "that accounts for it all."

The oft-repeated slander had been uttered; the falsehood which the lives of a thousand saints have disproved,—which the voice of the preacher, the pen of the learned, the experience of millions, and miracles of grace, and prodigies of penitence, daily contradict,—had been brought to bear, and Margaret, sighing deeply, carried away with her, as that conversation ended, an unfavourable impression of her sister's character, and a most mistaken view of that sister's faith.

In the mean time Ginevra had been conversing too. Lady Donnington had gone up to Mrs.

Thornton's room, and the rest of the company had left the drawing-room, with the exception of Mr. Warren, who was looking listlessly out of a window, near which Ginevra was working. A noise of horse's feet on the road below the terrace made her raise her eyes, and she saw Edmund Neville on horseback, galloping very fast, but curbing with a strong hand the fiery and foaming horse that was bounding under him. As he shot like an arrow past the window, Mr. Warren exclaimed—

“ There he goes. Reckless and headstrong as ever! Ah, Signora, your pretty little sister will have much ado to keep her captive in order, even if she succeeds in bringing him to her feet.”

“ Are you in earnest?” said his companion, suddenly turning towards him and looking him full in the face.

“ *I* am—but I do not think *he* is, though he certainly said something like it yesterday.”

“ It is impossible,” said Ginevra, and there

was a tremulous movement in her hands, as she rapidly passed her needle through the canvas.

“It is very undesirable he should marry so young,” continued Mr. Warren, “but by no means impossible that he is thinking of it. My agent told me that it was reported all over the county that he is about to marry your sister. I don’t believe it myself, but they say he will behave very ill to her if he does not, and between ourselves, Signorina, I must say that she looks head over ears in love with him already.”

“No, no,” exclaimed his companion in a hurried manner. “No, you must be wrong. It cannot be; but—but, you should speak to your nephew; you should tell him what people say. You will not let this go on; you can save much misery by speaking to him at once.”

“Oh; so I suppose Miss Margaret Leslie has confided to you her inclination for my too captivating nephew.”

"You are quite mistaken," replied Ginevra coldly, but in an instant returning to the charge, she added, "you promise, don't you, to speak to—your nephew?"

"But perhaps he really does mean to marry your sister, and if so, would it not be a pity to interfere and spoil such a match?"

Ginevra was silent, and Mr. Warren continued,—

"My nephew would do well to marry an heiress, for rich as he will be, his means will never equal his extravagance. I happen to know that he is deeply involved in debt already."

"Has he not a kind father?" asked Ginevra, without raising her eyes.

"Kind enough when he is not thwarted, but intractable in some cases; full of crotchets, and prejudiced to excess. He had a great antipathy to me at one time, but I won his heart when I was last in England by attending the meetings at Exeter Hall."

“What is Exeter Hall?” asked Ginevra, who had heard of Exeter 'Change, and supposed one of Mr. Neville's peculiarities might be a taste for wild beasts.

“A place, my fair signora, where we thank God that we are not as other men are—that is, deluded papists like yourself. Do not be angry—you know well I am no fierce Protestant like my brother-in-law, but it was necessary to convince him that I had not fallen a prey to Popery, the phantom that haunts him by day and by night. By the way, you will be a sad obstacle to Edmund's marriage with your sister. A Catholic sister-in-law! the very idea will make his hair stand on end!”

Mr. Warren sauntered out of the room, humming an opera air, and when the door closed behind him Ginevra's needle fell from her hands; her eye rested on the open book which Edmund had left on the table, then on her own hand. A

few tears rolled slowly down her face; she wiped them hastily away, and began to work again, while her brow contracted with an expression of deep and painful thought. She was roused by the sound of wheels, and glancing at the window, saw Lady Donnington's carriage drive away. She passed her hand once across her brow, drew a deep breath, and then perceived Margaret and Maud, who had entered the room together, and were advancing towards her. She gave a slight start, but quickly recovering herself, spoke to them in her usual gentle manner, and asked after Lucy.

"You will see her to-morrow," Maud answered; "she will come with my father and mother, and we all remain till Saturday."

"I am so glad of that," exclaimed Mrs. Warren, who had followed them into the room, "and especially that I find you mean to be very gay this week, Miss Leslic."



“O yes,” replied Margaret, in an absent and dejected tone; “so very gay.”

“On Thursday there is to be a ball,” said Maud, “and on Friday we shall act charades. Who do you expect to-morrow, Margaret, besides my people?”

“Sir Charles D’Arcy, and my uncle, John Thornton.”

“You must display all your talents on the occasion, signora,” said Mrs. Warren, turning to Ginevra; “you must sing, and act, and compose.”

“O, of course,” interrupted Maud; “you will be the prima donna, and *act* to perfection. I wonder what part would suit you best?”

Ginevra’s lip was quivering, and her head was bent over her frame to hide the workings of her countenance.

“We ought to have a scene from ‘She Stoops to Conquer,’” Maud continued, “or, to aspire

still higher, from 'All's Well that *ends* Well.' The very name of that play is a moral."

Walter, who had taken up a book and sat down by the table, raised his eyes, and looked with surprise at the group before him. Ginevra was silent, and seemed unable to smile or to speak. Maud was standing before the fire and watching her, with an expression of half amused and half spiteful interest, and Margaret, his darling Margaret, with swollen eyes, a curling lip, and contracted brow, leaned against the chimney, and looked from one to the other in a quick and restless manner. Mrs. Warren seemed chiefly engrossed in ransacking her memory for charades, and now and then announced that she had found the very word they wanted, but it was generally rejected as old, imperfect, or impossible to be got up. This went on for a while, and then Ginevra folded her work, drew her shawl round her shoulders, and glided out of the room. Maud

followed her with her eyes, and then whispered to Margaret—

“I am perfectly certain that she will contrive to see Mr. Neville before dressing time; I would bet anything that she does. Do you ever go to her room before dinner?”

“At six o’clock she likes to arrange my hair, and I always go to her then.”

“If you were to go at five, you would not find her.”

“No, she is almost always with my father at that hour.”

Maud looked disappointed, and for some time the silence was unbroken, except by the rustling of Walter’s newspaper, and Mrs. Warren’s murmured cogitations.

“‘Rose-Mary’—no, that’s too old; ‘Bull-Finch’—can’t be acted; ‘Ivan-hoc’—‘hoe’—what could be done for ‘hoc?’ Mr. Warren, how could we act ‘hoe?’”

This question was addressed to her husband, who had just come in, and was warming himself, with his back to the fire.

“ Oh, very easily, I dare say. Just read that.”

He tossed a letter into her lap, which she took up negligently, but after reading the first lines, her whole attention seemed riveted, and she looked up two or three times into his face with an anxious and inquiring expression. At that moment the door was opened, and Colonel Leslie asked,

“ Is Ginevra here ? ”

“ No,” cried Walter.

“ She is out,” said Mr. Warren ; “ I met her just now on the West Terrace.”

Maud looked at Margaret, who remained in gloomy silence, with her eyes fixed on the fire. She drew near to her and whispered, “ Can’t you tell Mr. Sydney to look for her ? ”

Anything of a plot or a contrivance was so

foreign to Margaret's nature, that she shook her head, and said nothing, and a moment afterwards, disgusted with Ginevra, with Maud, and with herself, she slowly crossed the room to leave it. Walter opened the door for her, and whispered, "Margaret, what *is* the matter with you ; are you ill or unhappy ?"

"Both," she exclaimed, and snatching away her hand which he had taken, she rushed to her own room, bolted the door, and cried bitterly.

At six o'clock a restless feeling of anxiety and curiosity would not suffer her to omit her usual visit to Ginevra ; when she entered her room, her bonnet and cloak were lying on a chair near the door ; she hastily touched them as she passed, and their heavy dampness proved that they had been only just taken off. Flowers were lying as usual on the table ; she took her accustomed place, and Ginevra began plaiting her hair. Neither of them spoke, but once Margaret started

as a hot tear fell on her brow. It was silently kissed away, and strange to say, in that moment she felt no anger or resentment, only a deep oppressive sense of misery. She hid her face in her hands, and her tears flowed in silence. Ginevra knelt by her side, and threw her arms round her. Grace opened the door, and both sisters started like frightened fawns; without a word or a glance, Margaret rushed out of the room, and while she finished her dressing, tried to collect her thoughts. She felt as if there were two different Margarets within her, and two Ginevras near her. The one who listened to Maud, and suspected her sister, and the one who had wept with that sister just now; and the Ginevra that Maud described, and that she dreaded and disliked, could it be that gentle girl whose tears had fallen on her brow, and whose lips had been so softly pressed on her cheek?

The dinner-bell rang before she had finished

dressing, and as she was hurrying down stairs, she passed Edmund Neville and Mr. Warren, who were speaking eagerly to each other, without noticing her approach. The latter was talking very fast, and she only distinguished these words: "It had occurred to me before, and all I can say is, that you may reckon upon me, and the sooner you go the better." Margaret took her place at dinner between Walter and the clergyman of the parish. The words she had overheard sounded in her ears, and she kept repeating to herself, "The sooner you go the better." Was Edmund going?—where?—when? One lingering hope remained. Was it possible that he was about to solicit his father's consent? She glanced at his face. It was gloomy and sad. Not once did his eyes seek her's; when he raised them, they invariably turned towards her sister, but with an expression of gloom and resentment that almost amounted to fierceness. Ginevra was as

pale as a sheet, and Margaret felt bewildered and frightened, but not jealous, as in the morning. She resolutely avoided responding to the glances which Maud was directing towards her, and as soon as it was possible, she gave the signal of withdrawal; as she stood by the door to let all the other ladies pass, Edmund, who had opened it, bent forward when Ginevra went by, and slipped a note into her hand. He had not seen that Margaret was behind, and she only remarked as she followed her sister into the drawing-room, that she seemed ready to faint, and grasped the back of a chair for support. She would not for worlds have revealed to Maud what she had just seen; an unutterable pity seemed to take possession of her soul, and as her sister left the room with faltering steps, she felt no irritation, nothing but a vague foreboding of evil for herself and for others. Maud, repulsed in some attempts at conversation, seized on a book; Mrs. Warren, con-



trary to her usual habit, was abstracted and silent; Mrs. Thornton, alone unruffled and undisturbed, maintained that sort of uninterrupted small-talk, which, unprovoked and unrewarded, pursued the senseless tenor of its way, through all the varied accidents of life. Later in the evening, when most of the company had assembled in the music-room, Maud began talking of the ball and of the charades, and making various plans about them. She had just allotted a part to Edmund, when Mr. Warren interrupted her by saying—

“Do you know that he talks of running away? I believe we are actually to lose him to-morrow.”

“What, Mr. Neville, is it possible?” Maud exclaimed; and Margaret and Ginevra raised their eyes at the same moment.

“I have had letters from Ireland, which oblige me to go home,” he answered briefly.

“And when shall you settle at Darrell-court?” asked Walter.

“That depends entirely upon circumstances. Perhaps very soon—perhaps *never*.”

Maud looked at Margaret, but she was sick at heart, and did not return the glance. The approaching days, which she had at one time looked forward to with so much pleasure, presented to her now the most irksome prospect, and she felt a vague wish that something might happen to stop a course of proceedings that seemed empty folly when all the spirit that had actuated its conception had disappeared. She wondered that rational beings could dance, and act, and play like a parcel of children. “Was life given us for such purposes?” she mentally exclaimed; and then she thought that life, as it appeared to her at that moment, was a sad, a dreary, an unprofitable boon—dim and colourless, like the landscape on which the sun has ceased to shine—long as a tale whose interest is exhausted—insipid as a fruit that has lost its savour. Engrossed by her

own thoughts, she scarcely attended to a single word that was said to her, and when asked to play, she went mechanically to the piano-forte, and went through a sonata without once looking about her, or uttering a word in answer to the compliments that were addressed to her ; for she played well, and the nervous uneasiness of her mind seemed to give strength to her fingers and expression to her touch. She had just risen to return to her work, when the butler walked up to Edmund Neville, and said to him eagerly—

“ Sir, your dog is here. He has found you out.”

A scuffle was heard at the door, and a large mastiff of the St. Bernard breed burst into the room, and rushed to his master with all the impetuosity of joy and exulting recognition.

“ Oh, what a magnificent creature ! ” exclaimed Maud Vincent, and bent down to caress him. He growled at her, and she withdrew alarmed. Margaret and Mrs. Warren also vainly tried to

approach him, and Edmund called him towards the door, when, suddenly leaving his master, the dog approached Ginevra, smelt her dress an instant, and then uttering a low joyful cry, jumped upon her, licked her face and hands, and laid his large head on her knees. She caressed him an instant, and then pushed him gently away. Edmund said, aloud—

“I suppose, Signora, that old Bruno acknowledges you for his countrywoman?”

The colour rushed into her cheeks; perhaps these words brought to her mind her own snowy Alps, and the Italian valleys at their feet, for she snatched the dog in her arms, and laid her face on his shaggy neck. Twice she repeated his name with a kind of passionate fondness, as if she lingered over the syllables and fixed them in her memory.

“You should *improviser* some stanzas, Signora,” observed Mr. Warren, in honour of the

dog who has paid you so signal a compliment."

General exclamations broke forth in support of Mr. Warren's suggestion. Edmund at the same time said something in a low voice to old Bruno, who had returned to him, and Ginevra's eyes fixed themselves upon him with an earnest steady gaze that seemed to make him uneasy; the colour deepened in his cheek, and leaning against the chimney, he hid his face with his arm. Still her eyes followed him, as if unconsciously; but in a few seconds she fixed them on the dog, who was now lying at her feet, and in a low deep voice, whose accents fell on the ear like the whisperings of an *Æolian* harp, she repeated some stanzas in Italian, the sense of which may thus be rendered in English:—

"Friend of the wanderer! Guide in the storm! In thy native mountains thou art wont to seek the lingering life that is ebbing away in

the grasp of death. The voice of the torrent, the fall of the avalanche, the smooth and fatal whiteness of the deep valley, cannot blind thy instinct or deceive thy sympathies.

“ Brave dog of the St. Bernard ! Tried friend of the wanderer ! When the shades of night have closed about him, and the precipice is yawning at his feet, and the peaks of the Alps, in their snowy shrouds, hang over him like ghosts, and he gives himself up for lost, it is then thy familiar bark, thy warm breath, thy strength, and thy tenderness, revive him. O, thou friend in need ! O, thou guide in darkness ! But is it given to thee, too, to read the tearless eye, and discern the struggles of the soul under the smooth surface of apparent calmness ? Does some strange instinct tell thee where a human heart is throbbing in silence, like the torrents of thine own Alps, when an icy prison binds them ?

“ The first breath of summer will burst *their*

chains ; *they* will spring forth, exulting into life, and gladden the valleys with their cataracts of foam, their rainbow colours and their deep songs of joy. The Spring must come to them ; the sweet breeze of the South must waken them again to life and to liberty ; but the whisperings of hope—when will they reach the heart that is waxing cold in its misery ? The sunshine of love—when will it melt the icy prison where the soul is struggling in silence ?

“ Thy kind eyes, thy warm breath, cannot do it ; thy strength is vain, thy pity is useless. It lies not with thee to comfort the sick at heart, or to revive the spirit which man has blighted. Go back to thy mountains, brave dog of the St. Bernard ; go to the snow-drifts, and bid them yield their victims ; call to the abyss, and bid it give up its dead ; seek for life in the glaciers, and carry warmth to the perishing : but come not in thy impotent love, and in thy vain compassion, to

“speak of hope to those whom hope is forsaking, or of joy to those whose joy is departed.”

The voice of the speaker was hushed, and seemed still to vibrate in the hearts of her hearers. Her attitude did not change; her eyes were still fixed on the dog at her feet, who was licking her hand gently, as if afraid of disturbing her. Mrs. Warren fidgetted about, and tried to say something in praise of the verses. Mrs. Thornton, who had not understood them, declared it was wonderful, but that she wished it had been done in English. Mr. Warren, Walter, and Maud, all seemed to feel that there was something in this scene beyond what met the eye. Walter drew near to Margaret, and, as if by accident, he took hold of her hand, and pressed it. Ginevra was the first to move; she walked slowly towards the door, but stopped before she reached it, and looked back towards the place where Edmund was standing. For the first time that evening he



looked at her; their eyes met; he saw an expression of such intense imploring entreaty in her's, that he seemed to forget himself, and started forward as if to go to her; but he stopped, and sitting carelessly on the music-stool as he passed the piano-forte, he laid his hand negligently on the keys, and played a few notes of a melancholy and expressive air. The colour returned to Ginevra's cheek as the sounds reached her; a slow faint smile flitted over her face; once more their eyes met, and then she left the room; while Edmund, seizing a newspaper, threw himself upon a couch, and hid his face with it. Maud went to the piano-forte, and after running her fingers along the keys, she called Margaret, and said—

“Have you ever heard the famous air in ‘Guido e Ginevra?’” and she played the same notes that Edmund had just imperfectly, but distinctly, rendered; and then as Margaret stood by with an anxious and bewildered countenance, she added—

“The words are as touching as the tune;” and she sang, in French, the well-known air which ends with these oft-repeated words :

“Je reviendrai pour dire encore, le nom si doux de Ginevra.”

Margaret went to her room, and sat down by the fire, with her face buried in her hands. She had not spoken to Edmund, or even looked at him, as she had left the library; and it was only now that she remembered that if he went early the next morning, she should not see him again. It had not occurred to her that this was possible, and a sharp pain shot through her heart at the idea. Her maid came in to undress her, and commanding her voice as well as she could, she inquired at what hour Mr. Neville had ordered his carriage.

“At six,” Grace replied, and Margaret’s heart sank within her. A moment afterwards there was a knock at the door, and Mrs. Dalton put in her head, and said—“Here is a note, my dear, which

Mr. Neville asked me to give you. He was so sorry not to have seen you leave the room, as he wished to say good-bye to you."

Margaret took the note with a trembling hand, but she could not open it before others. She dismissed Grace, she kissed Mrs. Dalton, shut the door, pressed the note to her lips, and burst into tears. She dared not open it; a faint hope still flickered in her mind, like the expiring light of the candle which Grace had just extinguished, and left on the table. With a superstitious anxiety she watched it rise, and fall, and sink as with a hopeless despondency, and then shoot up again with a kind of fierce resolution, and then burn dimly and faintly, and then throw out two or three sparks, as if it strove by a last effort of feeble strength to keep off its approaching end. "If it hold on but one second more," thought Margaret, as she broke the seal of the note in her hand, "I shall not despair." Her fingers trem-

bled, and the inclosure stuck to the envelope; once more a spark gleamed in the blackened wick, but disappeared before her eyes had glanced over the now unfolded paper, and read the courteous but common-place farewell which extinguished the last lingering hope of her aching heart. She threw it into the fire, but snatched the shrivelling paper before the flames had entirely consumed it, and with a sort of faint pleasure perceived that the writing was not yet all destroyed—the signature was still visible. She smoothed the paper, folded it, and cried bitterly. It was a great trial, and it was her first trial. She had never parted before from any one she loved, and she was afraid of her own feelings when she should wake the next day, and remember that Edmund was gone. She could not rest, she could not even attempt to lie down; but heaping fresh coals on the fire, she sat on, with her eyes fixed on the French

clock on the chimney-piece, sometimes clenching her hands as if in anger, sometimes with the tears rolling down her cheeks, and her head reposing on the back of the arm-chair, like a child exhausted with crying. The clock struck five, and she heard a sound of steps in the passage above her room, like somebody walking very lightly. In a few seconds' time she heard a door closed in a slow and cautious manner at the end of the gallery on which her own room opened, and then everything was quiet again. A moment afterwards Margaret started up in her chair, and exclaimed to herself, "O shame, shame!" and then again buried her face in her hands. Unconnected words and sentences fell from her lips; a strange contest seemed to be taking place within her. Once, overcome by fatigue, she fell asleep, and then woke up and cried out, "O no, Maud; O no." And an instant afterwards, she said, as if musing over the words—"Worse than

a coquette?" The clock struck six; she was getting very restless and feverish, and began to walk up and down the room, and then, in a few minutes, she opened the door, and looked down the dark gallery. At the farthest end of it a speck of light was visible; it was from the chink of a door; it was scarcely perceptible, but it was there, and the door was Ginevra's. "O that I dared open it," she exclaimed, "that I dared burst into that room, and kneel to her whom I wrong so grievously, whom I suspect ——"

The handle of the door on which her eyes were fixed softly turned, and then she heard again the sound of steps, and her soul sickened within her; she thought she knew the step, she had so often watched its approach. It had once been music in her ears; and now, that slow and cautious tread sounded like the knell—not of her happiness, that seemed gone already,—but of all her future peace of mind.

“I will speak to her,” she exclaimed. “It is a dream, perhaps, and a horrid one. To see her will dispel it.”

She crossed the gallery with trembling steps—she paused at the door. The sound of deep and stifled sobs met her ears—she opened the door; Ginevra was on her knees, her hair streaming over her face, and her whole frame quivering with emotion. At the sound of the opening door, she started up, and extended her arms wildly, pushing back the hair from her face, and uttering a sort of cry of hope and surprise, and some Italian word of endearment. Her eyes were blinded with tears; but in an instant she recognised Margaret, and said, “Sister!” in so gentle, and utterly mournful a tone, that it sounded like a cry for mercy. Margaret stood transfixed, bewildered, unable to collect her thoughts; but her eyes fell at that moment on a travelling fur glove that lay on the carpet close to the door. She

knew it well, and a tumultuous tide of passion rushed over her soul, sent the crimson blood into her cheek, and heaved in her swelling and indignant breast. With flashing eyes and curling lip she held it out to Ginevra, who took it mechanically, and pressed her other hand on her throat, as if to subdue the convulsive agitation of her frame.

“What do you wish? What do you want, sister?” she asked, as if she did not know what she said.

At that moment the sound of carriage wheels was heard, and both sisters started.

“Yes,” exclaimed Margaret, in a loud voice, as the sound died away in the distance—“yes, he is going! he goes! and would to Heaven he had never known you or me; would to God he had never set his eyes upon us, and brought misery to me—and to you. Oh! what has he brought to you? I know not—I dare not—I cannot think



or speak ; but guilty, very guilty you must be, Ginevra—for darkness, and silence, and shame have attended your actions. A false innocence has been on your brow, and a false virtue on your tongue. You have deceived me with every feature in your face, and with every accent of your voice. He is gone ; yes, thank Heaven ! he is gone ; but peace, and hope, and trust, are gone too, for ever gone, from this, my once happy home. O, may he never return ! May my eyes never behold him again ! May his own conscience, if deceit and treachery have not for ever hardened it, torment and punish him for the misery he has brought upon me,—aye, and upon you,” she continued, (as Ginevra faintly murmured, “For God’s sake—for mercy’s sake, do not curse him, Margaret,”)—“you, my fallen, my most unhappy sister. O Ginevra ! Ginevra ! was it for this that you were made so beautiful, so highly gifted, so captivating, to be only so infinitely vile.

Ginevra, I could hate you for the injury you have done me, if I did not pity you from my soul. You, who know so well, who can talk so well of pure, and noble, and holy things, you cannot be hardened—you cannot be so dead to all feeling—”

Was it the calm of death; was it the deadness of the soul that made those pale blue eyes so clear and mild, in their meek and most expressive sadness? Was the look of tenderness with which she watched the excited and quivering features of her indignant sister, another piece of well-acted deceit; and the convulsive energy with which she pressed to her heart the small crucifix she wore round her neck, another proof of hollow formalism or miserable hypocrisy?

“Sister,” she said at last, when, exhausted by her own vehemence, Margaret fell on a chair with her face hid in her hands—“sister, you must think ill, very ill of me; I cannot expect, or

even wish that you should not. No, Margaret, always shrink from the very first approach to evil or deceit. Shrink from it as from a poisonous serpent, and abhor it whenever and wherever you meet with it. But be merciful to the sinner, while you condemn the sin! Believe that, notwithstanding the strongest and most conclusive appearances of guilt, there may be—excuses, perhaps, or—bear with me, Margaret, listen to me—dangers, trials, Margaret!” she continued, drawing nearer to her sister. “I am still very young, and though I seem sometimes so calm and so strong, I can hardly bear the burthen that is laid upon me. I do not ask you to help me; for none can do that but God. I do not ask you to forgive me, for I may not now tell you how much or how little you have to forgive; but spare me, pray for me; pray that the acute sufferings which day by day I endure, may expiate whatever has been guilty in my life; and, O sister, this is my

most ardent prayer, that I may one day hear from your lips that you are happy again."

Margaret waved her hand impatiently; Ginevra wrung her own, and gazed upon her as if she would have read into her soul. She then stood before her, and, in a tone of voice gentle, but firm, addressed her thus—

"Margaret, it signifies little whether it be through my fault or through my misfortune that your hopes, and what you now call your happiness, are destroyed. You *never* can be Edmund Neville's wife; and *never*, even in your most secret thoughts, must you allow yourself to think of him as a husband or as a lover. I care not what you think of me; I care not now what impression you carry away with you, nor how you treat me in future, nor how you speak of me to others; but this conviction you *must* carry with you when you leave this room, and never lose it again as you value *all* that you believe me to have lost."

Margaret started up, caught her sister's hands, and, with an eagerness amounting to violence, exclaimed—

“Tell me what you mean. When you wept and kissed my hand just now I thought you guilty. Now you speak with a strange audacity, and I could almost fancy you to be innocent. If you are so, speak ; speak, Ginevra. Tell me any tale you choose, and I will believe it, or else let me leave the room and never trust in any one again.”

“Go,” said Ginevra, calmly and solemnly, “go, and never ask me again to speak of myself. Only remember my last words, and lay them to your heart. Our paths of duty are different, and though we may live together, if that even be allowed, we must never forget that an invisible barrier has risen between us, which you cannot—and I dare not—remove. If, with a great patience and a holy trust, you will bear with me, and suspend hard thoughts and abstain from harsh words,

it will be a great and wonderful effort of virtue ; and hereafter, my sister, you will be glad to think that you did not break a bruised reed—but if you cannot, then let God's will be done. Be it trial, or be it punishment, I am ready to receive at your hands far more misery than I have inflicted upon you. Only"—she stopped, hesitated, clasped her hands in supplication, and then, with a burst of such agony as she had not given way to before, exclaimed—"only, only spare my father !"

Margaret held out her hand without looking at her ; but as she was leaving the room, she returned impetuously, flung herself into her sister's arms, and both wept with uncontrollable emotion ; and when these two fair creatures parted, it was with a heavier weight of sorrow on their spirits than such young hearts are often doomed to endure.

## CHAPTER XI.

WHEN Margaret awoke on the following day, after two or three hours of restless and feverish sleep, she felt totally unequal to the labours of the day—that heavy labour especially of entertaining friends, and disguising her own feelings ; but the recollection that others would connect her illness, if she admitted it, with Neville's departure, gave her strength to rouse herself, and to surmount her dread of encountering the eyes of her family, the presence of her sister, and above all, the flippant remarks and sharp interrogatory glances of Maud Vincent. As she passed the hall clock, she started at perceiving how late she was, and hurried into the breakfast-room. Ginevra was in her place making tea, and looking perfectly

calm, though paler than usual. She silently put within her sister's reach whatever she wanted for her breakfast; and at the moment that Mrs. Thornton was about to cross-question her granddaughter about her looks, which certainly were not satisfactory, she diverted that lady's attention by a well-timed inquiry about the efficacy of some homœopathic powders administered the day before to the schoolmaster's wife. Maud was watching Margaret, partly from curiosity, and partly from real interest; she could not form any conjecture that satisfied her as to the state of things which Edmund had left behind him, and she was longing to be alone with her, that they might talk over his departure, and form plans for circumventing the enemy, as in her own mind she designated Ginevra. But this was not easily achieved; when they moved into the drawing-room, both the sisters sat at the same table, and Maud's efforts to induce Margaret to withdraw



elsewhere with her were vain. She had fetched her pencils and her colours, and began painting some figures in her sketch-book with a resolute application that baffled all attempts at conversation. Maud grew provoked, and asked Walter Sydney if he had seen Mr. Neville before he started. He said he had not ; he was off by six o'clock, he believed : and he too looked at Margaret. No blush was on her cheek, but her lip slightly quivered, and she gave, perhaps unconsciously, an expression of scorn to the face she was painting. Mr. Warren came into the room at that moment, and after taking up a newspaper for an instant, and playing with the ears of Ebro for another, he came up to the table, and said to Ginevra " Put on your things, Signorina, and come and look at the skaters in the park." To Margaret's surprise Ginevra instantly consented, and left the room to prepare for walking. It was a glorious winter's day, and the sun was shining brightly. Mr.

Warren was waiting on the steps of the terrace, and when Ginevra appeared at the hall-door, and walked towards him, he said to himself, "Now for it," like a man who is going to pull the string of a shower-bath. She joined him, and they descended towards the river, where several of the servants and a number of village boys were sliding and skating with some little skill, and a great deal of merriment. They reached the pretty bridge at the lower end of the park, and wrapped up in fur cloaks they sat down on the arch to watch the scene below. Mr. Warren pulled some of the grass from between the stones, knocked about the loose bricks, hummed, whistled, seemed embarrassed in short—a strange feeling to him; he had not been embarrassed when he went up for his degree at Oxford, nor when he made his maiden speech in the House of Commons, which he soon gave up, as too fatiguing; nor on that eventful occasion when he proposed to Mrs. Warren, which

he did in so abrupt and off-hand a manner, that she had first answered, "No, thank you," not comprehending it was the offer of his hand she rejected. But he *was* (in his, way at least) embarrassed now; and said, without looking at his companion—

"You know that Edmund has been speaking to me of your affairs? It is a difficult business, Signorina."

"Can you help us?" she asked in a low voice.

"Only by telling you the exact truth."

"Speak," she said again, and clasped her hands with a nervous contraction.

"That my brother-in-law will ever consent to your marriage is as great an impossibility as that this tree should walk across the river and take up its position on the opposite hill. Upon my word, I should as soon expect the one event to occur as the other. He is the most conscientious, the most prejudiced, and the most obstinate of men. He has *sworn* never to admit a Catholic into his

house. He has made various sacrifices to the fulfilment of that oath. He has neglected claims which might have been established to considerable property, from a determination not to have any dealings with Catholics; so you may imagine what chance there is of his consenting to the marriage of his only son with a person of that religion. No, I will not deceive you on that point. If Edmund should persist in marrying a Catholic, he will be disinherited, without the shadow of a doubt; and I must also add, in fairness to him, he *cannot*, for your sake as well as his own, run such a risk, or rather incur that certain penalty. Brought up as he has been in the most extravagant manner, fonder of luxury than any human being ever was, accustomed to gratify every whim as it arises, head over ears in debt already, and disinclined or unfit for every profession—by urging him to such a step, you would be plunging him and yourself into hopeless beggary; you would destroy every pros-

pect of happiness, nay, of respectability, for him, and act as his worst and most cruel enemy. As you care for him, as you value his peace of mind, his reputation, his honour, Signora, you must give him up."

"And if I *cannot* give him up?" she repeated slowly, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

"Why, in that case, I am sorry to say so, but he really must give you up."

"Did *he* say so? Did *he* say *that*?" asked Ginevra, grasping Mr. Warren's arm.

"No, but *I* say so, and you must feel it," he added coldly. She released her hold, and hid her face in her hands.

"I am vexed, my dear Miss Leslie, that you take it so much to heart, but indeed it is inevitable."

She raised her eyes one moment, and her lips murmured "God give me patience." Mr. Warren looked at her, and seemed struck with the expres-

sion of agony in her face. He pitied her, and said in a low voice—

“There would be *one* alternative, one resource.”

“What?”

“A change of religion,” he said, without looking at her, and affecting to gaze through his spy-glass at the skaiters below.

For an instant her eyes flashed fire, but a holier expression soon succeeded that first glance of indignation, and she gently but resolutely uttered the word “*never*.”

“You will get accustomed to the idea.”

“Heaven forbid!” she replied.

“Why, if you could be convinced, what a good thing it would be. Cannot you stretch a point in such a case, and persuade yourself to believe—”

“Mr. Warren,” she answered with a calm manner, but with a nervous voice, “if I could do violence to my own soul, discard my faith at will,

and call that error which the evidence of my reason, and every instinct of my being, affirms to be eternal truth, I might go a step further in my daring apostacy, and at last deem heaven itself a dream, and hell a fiction ; and then it is not at the change you propose that I would stop. *There,*" she said, and pointed to a spot where the ice was broken, and the rapid river was seen flowing underneath, "there lies my temptation ; a refuge from the misery of this hour, and a less dreadful self-destruction than that which you propose."

Almost unconsciously, Mr. Warren laid hold of her as she leant over the bridge ; but she turned to him, and a faint smile passed over her face.

"O, no ! My guardian angel has not yet forsaken me. I believe," she said, and raised her eyes to heaven. "I believe, and I can afford to suffer."

“ You think hardly of Protestants, Signora, if even a grave in that dark river would seem to you a better alternative than to adopt their faith.”

“ Say than to renounce my own,” she eagerly rejoined; “ the sacred truths we hold in common are part of the creed which I would rather die than forsake ! ”

“ Then what is it you feel about us ? ”

“ Inasmuch as you are Christians, the deepest sympathy—inasmuch as you are Protestants, an earnest hope that to the secret spirit God vouchsafes his inward revelations of light and of peace. Who can judge by what rays he illuminates the mind, or by what mysterious teaching he raises a soul to heaven and himself? but to abandon the truth when our hearts have received it, to cast away the pearl of great price that once was our's, to have had faith, and to lose it, to have knelt in breathless awe and in speechless adoration, when God had been near us and within us, and then,



with our lips, to protest against, and in our acts set at nought, the greatest and most awful of His gifts to man—this is a moral suicide, which none but a Catholic can conceive, because none other can incur its misery and its guilt.”

Ginevra's earnestness overpowered her, and she remained silent till Mr. Warren again addressed her.

“Heaven forbid that I should strive to persuade you to act against your conscience! I admit that if your convictions are unalterable, you cannot of course give them up; but in that case it is much to be regretted that you ever entered into an engagement beset with so many insuperable difficulties! Such a foolish, hopeless affair!” he repeated, with that sort of impatience which good-natured and matter-of-fact persons experience at what appears to them the needless sufferings which others entail upon themselves by giving way to their feelings; but he was touched by the

mournful eloquence of Ginevra's eyes, which were raised to his with a kind of mute appeal from the sentence he had just pronounced. Again he suggested, and again she rejected the only alternative which presented itself to his mind, and at last provoked with himself and with her, and wearied with the discussion, he exclaimed abruptly, "Well then, keep your faith, and give up my nephew. You must choose between—"

"God and man," she solemnly replied; "thank you for those words; they have given me strength. Now let us return home. You said you could not help me, and you were right."

"You have a great sacrifice to make," replied Mr. Warren, "but young as you are, and with a long life before you—"

"Yes, a long life—perhaps as long as his," she added in a low voice.

"You will feel satisfied at having released him from a painful position. As the cause, though

the innocent cause, of his ruin, you never could have been happy."

Once more she glanced at the smooth river at her feet, and then at the blue vault of heaven over her head.

"Now you will both start afresh in life; you will have nothing with which to reproach each other."

"No, we must not reproach each other," Ginevra mechanically repeated; and they walked on in silence, except that Mr. Warren now and then made an observation tending to enforce the necessity of the sacrifice he had urged her to make. When they were within a few steps of the house, she suddenly stopped, and said in a low deep voice, "Are you *sure* that you have told me the truth?" There was such intense misery in the tone with which this was uttered, that Mr. Warren startled, and felt shocked at having been the means of inflicting it, but he

could not retract, and the tear that glistened in his eye gave a death-blow to her hopes. He felt then for her, but saw no means of escape. She pressed his hand, went up to her room, and was alone for an hour, looking her fate in the face, and struggling against despair. It was true, as she had said it herself, that Ginevra Leslie was very young for the load of care, for the heavy burthen which weighed on her spirit, and taxed the energies of a character which nature had made ardent, and to which education and circumstances had taught self-control. Full of that indomitable fire which genius kindles and passion nurses, she had taken life and its mysteries and its realities, as if by storm, and at thirteen she had ceased to think, to speak, or to feel as a child. The strong religious principles which grew with her growth, and modelled her whole being, grappled with that nature, and curbed its impetuosity. Her imagination, her talents, her enthu-

siasm, had been directed to one end by the influence of a religion, which, while it is ascetic in its discipline, and uncompromising in its morality, deals with each human being according to his secret needs, and purifies while it exalts every aspiration of his soul. She had seen in the gorgeous temples of her own land the riches of earth, the precious marbles and the sparkling gems, the gold of the mine, and the pearl of the ocean lavished in profusion on the shrines of the Almighty ; and she had learnt, at the same time, that the precious things of man's heart and of man's brain, its pearls of great price, its treasures of deep thought, its gems of countless value, should be laid upon the altar of God, not to be destroyed, like the holocausts of old, but to be hallowed and exalted by the light of the sanctuary. Every inspiration that raised her soul from earth was directed to heaven ; each burst of enthusiasm was sanctified by a sacrifice ; the consciousness of

superior power was incitement to new exertions, and the revelations of her own genius, startling appeals, to which she responded with uplifted eye and with bended knee. When the day of trial came, the same influence saved her from despair.

Her story was a strange one, and must now be briefly told. Consigned in her infancy to the care of her mother's relations, she had been brought up in an old mansion, whose departed grandeur had left traces of its existence in the fresco paintings which still lingered on its walls, and in the mutilated statues, the broken fountains, and the avenue of cypresses which ornamented its gardens. One suite of apartments in this abode was occupied by Father Francesco, who was at once the friend and the chaplain of the owner of that old palace. His name has already been mentioned in this story as the uncle and the guardian of Ginevra Ferrari, the mother

of our heroine. The simple furniture of these rooms contrasted with the magnificence of the gilded ceilings and the painted walls. One small gallery, that led from the hall to the chapel, was well stored with books, French, Latin, and Italian. A writing-desk that stood by one of the high windows, and a pile of heavy folio volumes that lay at its side, gave indication that their owner had not neglected to improve by study the abilities with which Nature had endowed him. The chapel was rich in comparison with the rest of the building; and the relics of past splendour, which elsewhere had been suffered to decay, were carefully cherished, and seemed to render a silent homage to the sanctity of the spot, where night and day a lamp burned before the altar, and shed a mysterious light on the carved effigies and the sculptured walls of that secluded shrine. On the opposite side of the building another lamp often burned through the long hours of night, and still faintly

glimmered when the glory of the rising sun overpowered its feeble rays. This was in the studio of Leonardo Ferrari, the artist, who some twenty years before had been the friend and the companion of Ginevra's father. Devoted to his art, engrossed by that ruling passion, day and night he worked with an unwearied energy that left him no time for rest, and no care for the outward world. The only object that won a smile from the ardent painter, or beguiled him for an hour from his own life-destroying toils, was his sister's child, the little Ginevra, whose voice and whose eyes were the music and the sunshine of his lonely existence. In that singular home, like a flower that blooms unseen on the walls of a ruined cloister, she spent her childhood and advanced towards womanhood.

Between the aged priest, whose treasure was in heaven, and whose spirit seemed only to linger on earth for her sake, and the impassioned and



often disappointed artist, who found in her presence and in her youthful enthusiasm, a refuge from the feverish dreams that pursued him, her young life took its course, and her young spirit its direction. Other circumstances also combined to mould her character and her mind, and to stamp them with originality. By her father's express desire she had been early instructed in English, and furnished with a library which comprised all the best works, both ancient and modern, which could give her a familiar acquaintance with English literature. She had studied Milton as much as Dante, and loved Shakspeare better than Ariosto. The rich stores of English philosophy, of English eloquence, and of English poetry, sunk into a mind which the blue skies of Italy, and the deep sense of what was beautiful in nature and in art, had ripened into early maturity. She learnt of Father Francesco, whether on her knees in the chapel, or with her

books at his side, to connect every emotion with a duty, every exertion with a prayer, and in the homes of the poor, or by the beds of the dying, these lessons assumed a reality which no subsequent impression could efface. No whisper from the world without had disturbed the even tenor of her life; the pale water-lily floating on the silent pool of the deserted gardens in which she loved to wander, seemed an emblem of herself, of her unsullied purity, of her calm existence, and of her unnoticed beauty. But the time was approaching when the storms of life were to sweep over that tranquil surface, and stir up in its source that well-spring of suffering which lies hidden in the depths of every human destiny. First came the day when a sacred duty, an imperative summons to a distant scene of action, called away Father Francesco from his home, not as had been often the case before, for a few months, but for an undefined and uncertain

period. The first tears that had filled Ginevra's blue eyes since the day of her infancy, flowed in speechless sorrow as she received his parting blessing, and for the last time knelt at his side at the same place where, some years before, he had received her first confession, and now his voice had faltered slightly, as he concluded the sacred rite, and pronounced the words of dismissal, "Go in peace, and let us pray for one another." They had been the last she had heard from his lips; this had been her wish and his; long must they be treasured in her heart, long must be her struggles, and fiery her trial, before the same voice shall speak—if ever, on earth, it shall speak again of peace in her ears.—

Alone with Leonardo Ferrari, she exercised for a few months a ministry of consolation—a mission of tenderness, which required all her intelligence and gentleness to sustain. His spirit had been too keen,—his sensibility too ardent,—the visions

of future fame too delusive, and the disappointing realities of life too overpowering for health of mind or of body to remain unimpaired. A desponding languor, or a feverish restlessness, alternately depressed his spirits or harassed his nerves. With more talent than skill, with more genius than power, he toiled day and night, won praise from others for productions from which he himself turned with disgust ; and the while his strength was failing, and his life slowly ebbing. Like an angel of peace, Ginevra stood beside him, and sometimes her words or her caresses would soothe his agitation, and win a smile from his care-worn spirit ; he would cast aside his brushes, turn away from his easel, and suffer her to lead him out into the balmy atmosphere of an Italian spring, into the beautiful gardens of the Palazzo Giusti, or into the picturesque streets of Verona. Gradually, as his strength diminished, he seemed more indifferent to the objects which he had so ardently

pursued. He would look mournfully round his studio, and contemplate with a painful earnestness the picture which twenty years before he had painted in Rome, and which was the original cause of Leslie's marriage with his sister. He had never parted with it, and now that the evening of his life was closing in, it seemed dearer to him than ever; the memories of the past took the place of the eager anticipations of the future, and they seemed to concentrate upon Ginevra as the sole link that connected them with the present. But the frame was sinking, and the mind was worn out, sore, and disturbed; it could not dwell with calmness on any subject of interest; and the more intense grew his affection, the more acutely self-tormenting were his thoughts. She was consigned to his charge—she was alone in the world—her father in India, Father Francesco in South America. They had left her to him; they had thought him young still in years, energetic in character;

and youth, and strength, and life, were failing. He felt as if he could have died in peace had her fate been decided, and her happiness secured. His restless eyes would wander from her mother's picture to herself, and an almost fierce impatience possess him when she smiled gaily upon him, and moved about that silent mansion like a ray of sunshine in the house of mourning.

About ten months after Father Francesco's departure, a young Englishman came to Verona, and visited the studio of Leonardo Ferrari. The same picture which so many years before had riveted Colonel Leslie's attention, captivated his fancy. While he lingered near it, he happened to glance at the garden below, and saw Ginevra tying up some of the roses which hung in garlands from one cypress tree to the other, and smiling at the little peasant girl who was gathering into her lap the shower of rose leaves which fell about her head. It was a pretty picture, and for a few

minutes Edmund Neville watched it, and then started with surprise as a sweet and powerful voice—an Italian voice—sung in English, only with so much of foreign accent as gave the words a pretty distinctness, the song in Cymbeline :

“Hark, hark, the lark at Heaven’s gate sings,  
And Phœbus gins arise,  
His steeds to water at those springs  
On chaliced flowers that lies ;  
And winking Mary-buds begin  
To ope their golden eyes,  
With everything that pretty bin :  
My lady sweet, arise !  
Arise ! arise !”

These words were adapted to an Italian air, and the effect was altogether so peculiar, that he felt as if he was dreaming ; and from that day began a dream of bliss which ought never to have been yielded to, or never to have been dispelled. He came to gaze again on the face that had bewitched him—on the voice that had entranced him. He lingered in the studio, he visited the chapel, he explored the ruins, he spent hours and days with Leonardo, whose spirits seemed to revive in this

intercourse with one whose manners and whose language reminded him of the only happy period of his blighted existence. He told him the story of Colonel Leslie's second marriage, and the secret of Ginevra's half-English origin. He clung to his society with a morbid predilection, and when he saw the signs of dawning passion in his piercing eyes, and the impetuous workings of that passion when once aroused, he felt as if a load of care had been removed from his breast. He saw that the spell that had bound him was as powerful as it was intense, and that Ginevra herself, at first unconsciously, then with heart-misgivings, and at last with all the earnest tenderness and simplicity of her character, yielded to its influence, and in return for his ardent and devoted affection, gave the deep enduring love of her young heart. He saw it and rejoiced, for he never doubted the purity of Neville's intentions, and he would have done him injustice if he



had. Whether such a temptation had ever crossed his mind in the early days of his intercourse with Ginevra, and before he was aware of her relationship with Colonel Leslie, none can tell ; but if it ever did, no traces of it remained, as he became acquainted with her character, and instinctively felt that she was one of those with whom, even in thought, he dared not connect aught of shame or dishonour. The only son of over-indulgent parents, whose prejudices he had never yet opposed, of whose boundless kindness to himself he had repeated proofs ; far from his own country, from his old associations, he lost sight of the immense difficulties which a marriage with Ginevra would present. Blinded by passion, he foresaw indeed that his father would refuse his consent if it was asked, but never doubted for an instant that if his marriage was accomplished he should soon be received into favour, for he knew that his parents would be punishing them-

selves by withholding their forgiveness ; the alliance with Colonel Leslie's family was honourable, and the fact of his second marriage had long ago been recognised by his relations. His only desire, therefore, was to obtain Ginevra's consent to an immediate union, and in this object he was well seconded by Leonardo ; to him he diminished the amount of opposition which his family were likely to offer to his wishes, and from her he altogether concealed it. He was of age, he was independent, his parents he told her had always wished him to marry young. Colonel Leslie had been a friend of his father's at college, and would certainly approve of his daughter's marriage with an Englishman, whose fortune was ample, and whose family was ancient. Ginevra was inexperienced, and totally ignorant of the ways of the world, but her instinctive delicacy of feeling, and tenderness of conscience, revolted from the idea of marrying without the express

consent of her own Father, or of father Francesco, and with her arm round Leonardo's neck, and a deep blush on her cheeks, she implored him not to urge her to become Neville's wife for at least a year, and to write to both her absent guardians, before a final consent was given to—

“To your happiness, Ginevra, and to what will secure my peace of mind—to what will enable me,” he vehemently continued, “to die without the anguish of leaving you alone in the world—to die without the burthen of earthly cares to draw my soul back from the opening vision of eternity.”

Ginevra pressed his hand to her heart, and her lips quivered.

“You are quite wrong in supposing,” he continued with feverish eagerness, “that I have not the right to sanction your marriage. You know how uncertain all communication with Father Francesco must inevitably be ; and as to Leslie,

he had but one fear which, through your childhood, has ever haunted him, and that is that you would take the veil, and never see him again but through the grate of a convent parlour. He made me promise that I would never consent to your residing, even for a short time, in a monastery, lest it might induce you to renounce the world."

"There is no danger," she said, and gazed at a letter in her hand, one of Neville's ardent and impassioned declarations of eternal affection; "no hope of it," she added, and her tears fell fast on the paper.

"I have promised," continued Leonardo; "I have promised, and now when I die, Ginevra—when I have left you alone in the world—child of my heart! where will you go, what can you do? Fair as an angel, and helpless as an infant, who will care for thee, who will watch over thee? my flower, my treasure, my spotless lily. You do not know all I know. You cannot understand the

dangers — the difficulties that will beset you. Here, in your home, you may not remain when I am gone; and if—” a sudden thought blenched his cheeks, and his agitation grew so great that he almost gasped for breath.

“I can never be alone, never forsaken, Leonardo mio,” she gently whispered, and kissed his burning brow. He was ill, very ill, and fever and weakness were struggling for mastery in his exhausted frame.

“One last effort I must make,” he feebly murmured, and raised himself on his couch. “Ginevra, if you did not love Edmund Neville, I would not ask you to give me peace at the expense of your own—to ease my aching heart and my harassed brain at the cost of one sigh or one tear of your’s ——”

“Oh!” exclaimed his niece, as she fell on her knees at his side, “if I did not love him I might obey you, and not tremble; but ——”

“You do love him ; your heart is his, and nothing stops you but a vague misgiving ——”

“A nameless terror,” she murmured. “O, Father Francesco ! Father Francesco !”

“You know that Edmund has promised you the free exercise of your religion—that he respects your faith. Ginevra, my strength is failing. Hear my dying prayer. Do not call obstinacy conscience, or self-will self-sacrifice, Ginevra, dearest!”

A change came over his face, an expression of such intense anxiety that the poor child at his side could withstand it no longer, and murmured in broken accents—

“Do with me as you will, uncle Leonardo.”

At that moment Edmund Neville joined them, the pale thin hand of Leonardo grasped his, and in a faint voice he said—

“She has promised.”

The flush of joy in his dark eyes, the rapture with

which he thanked her, the transports of happiness which he evinced, and the look of repose with which her uncle laid back his head on the pillow, and the faint smile which flitted over his countenance as Edmund knelt at her feet, and imprisoned her hand in his, and gazed on her pale fair face, as if his life depended on her smile, all failed to give Ginevra that security which her throbbing heart so much needed. She had now promised, and she must not by her misgivings throw a gloom on the eve of her marriage-day, and poison the bliss of her lover, and the peace of her uncle. She smiled sweetly on both, and she prayed much alone in the chapel; but, about to be united forever to one whom she loved and who loved her with such passionate devotion, she had no intoxicating dreams of future happiness—no brilliant anticipations of the life she was entering upon—something whispered to her heart that all was not right; and when she drew near the altar

her step faltered, and the hand she placed in his was as cold as ice. For a few weeks after her marriage, nothing realised this presentiment. Leonardo seemed to revive at the sight of their love—it carried him back to the days when Leslie and his sister had also wandered under the same shades, and drained their cup of bliss in the short period of their married life. But this reprieve was only the last expiring effort of sinking life; his malady increased with fearful rapidity; and about three months after the marriage, he died with Ginevra's hand locked in his, and his eyes fixed on Edmund Neville with an expression of mingled confidence and supplication—a dying appeal, which seemed to embody the hopes and the fears which at that last hour were haunting his departing spirit. A few weeks after his death Ginevra was walking with her husband in the avenue near the Casa Masani, and for the first time since that event her grief was giving place



to a feeling of enjoyment, which the calm beauty of the evening, and the glorious radiance of the sunset sky, was shedding in her soul. In the morning she had attended a solemn service for the repose of that spirit which on earth had been so restless—so keen in its aspirations—so self-tormenting in its delusions—and the silence of nature, in that her twilight hour, seemed to harmonise with the prayer which was still rising from her heart, with the sacred accents which were still lingering in her ears—and Edmund kissed away the tears that were slowly coursing down her cheeks, and watched with eyes that told a tale of passionate love for the answering smile that, like a ray of moonlight on the waters, had more sweetness than brightness, and more tenderness than joy. Edmund seldom spoke of the future, and she never asked. In her character and in her religion there existed a strong principle of self-oblivion; not merely the self-

abnegation which can make sacrifices, but the forgetfulness of self which in religion produces an unlimited surrender of our whole being to the will and the disposal of Him by whom and for whom we were made ; and in human affections, a devotion which forgets what it gives in gratitude for what it receives, and when even that poor return is withheld, takes refuge in the consciousness that "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and is grateful still for its own boundless capabilities of loving and of suffering. Edmund's will was her law ; Edmund's happiness was her object ; her own she seldom thought of. But as they sat together that night, she felt a sense of happiness steal over her heart, and her spirits rose as Edmund told her that his love for her increased every day, that she was the joy of his soul, the one object for which he lived, the one being on earth for whom he would give up life and all things else, and all those impassioned

truisms, those sublime common-places, which have been uttered by human lips and have thrilled in human hearts from generation to generation, and will be uttered, and will be believed, and will do their fatal or their harmless work, on to the time when time shall cease to be.

“ Here is Ginnetta,” said Ginevra, as the little Milanese waiting-maid approached, with something raised above her head.

“ A post-letter, Signora,” she exclaimed, and threw it into her mistress’s lap.

It was directed in an English hand to Edmund, and he seized it with impatience, and tore it open. A dark cloud passed over his face as he read it. His colour deepened, his eye-brows contracted, his lip curled, and his whole bearing denoted agitation. He rose from the bench where they had been sitting, and walked up and down the avenue with hurried steps. When a vague presentiment of evil has haunted the soul,

and it suddenly fastens on the truth, it encounters it with a desperate calmness that astonishes itself. Ginevra had never explained to herself what she feared; now she seemed to understand it at once, and like a flash of lightning through her brain darted the thought,—“He is ruined, and through me!” Her hopes, her fears, her fate, her peace, were nothing—less than nothing—dust in the balance,—in comparison with that one thought. She went up to him and said, gently, “Edmund, I must see this letter. There must be no secrets between us.” He was rolling the paper in his hands while his eyes were darting fire, and his thin lips were tightly compressed. There was a mixture of childish passion and fierce, concentrated resolution in his countenance and in the tone in which he repeated, without listening to her—

“They *shall* yield, by heaven, they *shall* yield.”

She turned very pale, and leant against a tree for support.

“Edmund, have you deceived me?” she faintly murmured, but did not repeat the words, when he turned towards her with a look of love and misery which pierced her to the heart, and held out his arms to her. She sank on the seat by his side, and took the letter from his hand; she read it, and a thousand new and startling thoughts seemed to rise in her mind during that moment. She understood the past; she foresaw the future; a fearful revolution was taking place within her. In his blind and selfish passion, this man who was by her side, who was holding her hand, who was watching her while she read,—this man had made her the instrument of his own ruin; had placed her in her unsuspecting helplessness, between himself, and duty, and honour, and happiness, and there—there she must remain, like the angel’s sword in

the apostate prophet's path, where the hand of God had placed her,—and from that path of duty and of misery she must not swerve. She saw it, she felt it; her heart sickened within her, her brain almost gave way; reason would have forsaken her, even love might have failed in that her hour of need,—but religion was there, and the torrent was stemmed, and the path was clear, and the victory was won. The past was irrevocable; the future must be met by him and by herself in the spirit of expiation,—where sin or error had been; of resignation,—where the sin or the error had been involuntary. No reproach passed her lips: there was reproach, and he felt it, in the increased paleness of her cheek, and in the tremulous accents of her voice as she asked him in a subdued tone—

“ And *now*, my Edmund, what can we do ? ”

He hid his face in his hands, and remained silent. He dared not tell her how desperate was the struggle in his heart between his passion for

her and his reluctance to forego those worldly advantages which his marriage with her threatened to destroy. It had never occurred to him for an instant to suppose that his father had the power, even if he had the will, to disinherit him, and this stunning intelligence was communicated for the first time in the letter that informed him of the strength and of the inveterate nature of that father's prejudices against the religion which his wife professed. The faint rumour which had reached his home, and which was supported by his prolonged absence, of an attachment formed in Italy, had raised in that home such a tumult of anger and apprehension as can be conceived only by those who have had to deal with characters such as that of Neville's father—too earnest, too conscientious, too lofty, not to inspire respect and attachment; and too stern, too inflexible, not to create despair in the hearts of those who see no point by which to approach, no weakness by

which to soften, no emotion by which to work on its rugged conscientiousness and its smooth impassibility—and Mr. Warren, who was at that time travelling in Italy, was implored by his sister, Edmund's mother, to find out her son, to warn him, to save him; to adjure him by all the sacred ties that bound him to his family and to his country, to return at once to England, and to break off any intimacy which must inevitably end in bringing dishonour on the object of his attentions;—or, if he should be so reckless, so infatuated, so mad, as to think of marriage,—expose him to the endless resentment of his father, to the loss of all his worldly prospects, and to an eternal separation from herself. Mr. Warren was perfectly ignorant of his nephew's movements, and inclosed a letter to him to the banker, at Geneva, which was the last place from whence Edmund had written to him; he communicated to him the substance of his mother's letter, and added to it



such legal particulars as gave to her expressions an overpowering reality. This was the news that had fallen like a thunderbolt on the heart of Ginevra's husband, and never did a more fearful storm rage in any human breast than swayed his in that hour. He loved her ardently ; and even in that moment did not regret that he had bound her to himself by irrevocable ties ; she was his, and must be his for ever ; but the threatened consequences of that act must be guarded against, and his marriage remain a secret till such time as he should succeed in overpowering his father's objections ; or, at least, in weakening the strength of his prejudices. Perhaps, also, some vague hope crossed his mind that he might work a change in her religious creed, and then the daughter of Colonel Leslie, and the convert to Protestantism, would be hailed by his family as the most welcome bride he could present to them. But it was difficult to look Ginevra in the face, and to propose to her a

course of long and arduous dissimulation. It was difficult, while his protestations of boundless devotion were still echoing in her ears, to condemn her to a humiliating silence, and an equivocal position. Her eyes were still fixed on the fatal letter, and she was repeating, as if to persuade herself, of the fact—as if hoping against hope—

“He did not know it; he was deceived himself.”

The flush of burning shame was on Edmund’s cheek; he drew her to himself, and whispered—

“Ginevra, you love me?” She pressed his hand to her lips, with more of unflinching devotion than of passionate affection. Perhaps he felt it, for with violent emotion he exclaimed, “Ginevra, you despise me.” There was no scorn in her eyes—there was no resentment in her heart—there was no thought of herself,—of her own bitter disappointment, of her endangered happiness, of her hopes deceived, and her con-

fidence abused at the altar where she had surrendered her life, her fate, into his keeping,—and thrown at his feet, to be crushed or cherished at will, all save her faith on earth and her hopes of heaven. But in her face and in her soul, in her quivering lips, and her clasped hands, there was an expression of indescribable emotion as she looked at her husband, who, overcome with agitation, had again hid his face in his hands, and was vainly striving to address to her the words which were rising to his lips.

At last, with a strong effort, he mastered himself, and in rapid and incoherent language described the impossibility of owning his marriage at once, and braving the anger of his father. He told her that for her sake, as well as for his, he must use prudence and discretion in this matter ; and as he spoke, he sought to deceive himself as well as her, and partly succeeded. Every word that he had said to her before marriage, every

evasive answer with which he had baffled her timid but oft-repeated inquiries about the sentiments of his family, were present to *her* mind, as he rapidly detailed the difficulties that beset their path, the dark clouds that hung over their destiny, and the plan of conduct they must follow. Still she did not reproach him, but once she laid her hand on his and said—

“Edmund, you are the master of my fate, the ruler of my destiny. Ignorant and helpless I cannot withstand your will, or over-rule your decisions; but bear with me for a moment. I would not give you pain, dearest, or add to the bitterness of this hour; but pause, pause before you engage yourself and me in a course where truth will be a danger and deceit a duty. The sufferings of this hour (her voice faltered and her hand trembled) are the result of ——”

“My boundless love for you—it knew no measure, Ginevra, and it feared no dangers.”

“Be true to it, and to yourself,” she exclaimed; “take me to the feet of your father, and let my deep love, and my fatal ignorance, and ——”

“Your too bewitching beauty, your too transporting loveliness,” interrupted Edmund, as she stood before him, with tears streaming down her cheeks, and a deep flush tinging those cheeks which were usually as pure and white as the Parian marble.

“Plead my excuse and yours,” she continued. “O Edmund, dearest Edmund, *truth—truth*, for Heaven’s sake *truth*, and then misery and wretchedness, if God pleases. Life is short, my beloved, and eternity is long.”

She was looking more beautiful then than the instant before, for her eyes were raised to heaven, and the spirit of hope and faith was kindling in her glance and shining on her brow, but she had risen too high for him—she had scaled the mount where he could not follow, and soared through

the clouds he could not pierce. The sound of those words, *misery and wretchedness*, had dragged him down to earth again, and he exclaimed with bitterness :—

“Proclaim to the world, if you will, that we are married. Refuse to grant me the short period of delay and of silence which I ask, and we are both undone ; or consent for a while to submit to a painful necessity. Bear for my sake a few months of trial and suspense, and then—at your feet, in my arms, my Ginevra,”—he continued, as he knelt before her, and drew her fondly to his breast, “and then years of bliss will follow, and in their sunshine you will forget, you will pardon the clouds which have obscured the first dawn of our happiness. You will forgive me, dearest, for having bound you to myself, for having seized on the priceless treasure of your love, and taught you to suffer through me—for me,” he added, as her lips were pressed to his, and she murmured :

“Must you leave me, Edmund?”

“Not now, not yet.”

She turned very pale, and said no more. That evening she glanced at her wedding-ring, and then drawing it from her finger she passed through it a black velvet ribbon and hid it in her bosom.

“If not there — *here*,” she said, and in this simple manner gave her assent to the trial she was about to endure.

What tears she shed in silence — what deep tears that day’s anguish left behind it, what fears haunted the night that succeeded it — fears such as those of a child who walks in the dark, who clings with terror to the hand that leads him, but which he dares not wholly trust, — none knew but herself. But there was a light in her path even in that stormy hour; and narrow as was the way she trod, a ray fell upon it, and each step she took was firm, though the next was hid in darkness.

During the days that followed, Edmund was, by turns, gloomy and desponding, or joyous and sanguine, according as imagination presented to him the future in a dark or in a bright aspect. He was distracted about the present, and tortured his brain to devise some plan by which he could leave Ginevra in safety, and hasten to Ireland himself to pave the way towards the acknowledgement of his marriage. One morning, after he had spent a night of restless agitation, letters were brought to his wife, from her father, and from the English consul at Genoa, informing her that Colonel Leslie was returned to England, and on receiving the news of Leonardo Ferrari's death, had written to direct that his daughter should proceed to Genoa, there to join Mr. and Mrs. Warren, old friends of his own, who were on the point of returning to England, and who had agreed to take charge of her. There was a note enclosed in the packet from Mrs. Warren herself,



written in a courteous and friendly tone, and expressing the pleasure she felt in the prospect of making Miss Leslie's acquaintance, and offering to come herself and fetch her from Verona, if it would be more convenient, or more agreeable to her. Agitating and complicated as the state of things was becoming, a smile crossed Edmund's countenance, at the strangeness of the coincidence which thus appeared to throw his wife under the protection of his own relations, and hazardous as was the step, and great as appeared the risks that attended it, he soon came to the conclusion that the summons must instantly be complied with, and the difficulties met as they arose, and braved if they increased. This turn in their affairs would enable him to proceed alone to Ireland, and Ginevra, once established in her father's house, acknowledged openly as his daughter, idolised as she must be by all who came near her, would stand in the eyes of his

family in a very different light from the Italian girl, the niece of an Italian priest, the very name of whose country, and of whose creed, would be abhorrent to their most cherished prejudices. The sight of her father's handwriting strangely affected Ginevra, and for the first time a sense of guilt and remorse took possession of her soul. Instead of being, (as poor Leonardo had assured her,) in some remote part of India, he was returning to his own country at the very moment when she had married without his consent, and she must meet him again with a secret in her heart, and in his home and by his side bear his own name, which she had neither the right to assume, nor the power to forego. Almost a child in years, quite a child in guileless simplicity, she was to begin life with a woman's heart, and a woman's hardest trial—married, she was to bear the torment of suspense and the burthen of long concealment—innocent, she was to endure the

trembling anxiety, the keen apprehension of guilt—she almost flinched from the task, and her courage well nigh forsook her. But even remorse—if the nervous regret, the newly awakened pang of recollection could be termed remorse, where even error had scarcely been—was not selfish in that pure heart and gentle spirit. Her sin, for such she now called it, was confessed in deep penitence, and each suffering in store for her she hailed as the purifying expiation which God would appoint and at last accept. On the following day, she spent an hour in the chapel, where she had so often knelt, and in the place where she had received Father Francesco's parting blessing, she prayed for him, and her heart whispered that he was praying for her. Perhaps it was his prayer which was obtaining for her at that moment the peace and the strength she so much needed. As the shades of evening were closing, Edmund Neville came to fetch her. He

had stood without the church, and leaning against the column, he had heard her sobs faintly audible in the silence of the darkening aisle, and he had writhed with the pangs of self-reproach, and the bitter grief of parting ; and when through the heavy folds of the curtained door she glided out into the moonlight, and stood before him with a smile of divine sweetness and calmness, his soul melted within him, and weeping like a child, he fell at her feet, and implored her forgiveness. She put her hand on his lips, she kissed his forehead, she murmured a blessing in his ear, and smiled through her tears. At last it was she who tore herself from his arms, who pointed to the travelling-carriage which was waiting at the gate, and who spoke of hope and of courage, as he almost cursed himself for the misery he was inflicting upon her and upon himself. It was not till she had lost sight of him, that she trembled at the thought of what the morrow would bring forth.

Instead of proceeding to England at once, he lingered for some weeks secretly in the neighbourhood of Genoa, where a long illness of Mrs. Warren's protracted their stay. To catch a glimpse of his wife as she passed through the rooms of the Palazzo—to meet her for an instant in the streets, and exchange a few hurried words with her, was the whole object of his days, for separation and uncertainty had augmented ten-fold his passion, and almost robbed him of his senses. At last she left Genoa, and then he travelled day and night to England. When he reached his home he found his parents in utter ignorance of the object or of the nature of his attachment; and before he could speak on the subject, two hours after his arrival, his father led him to the window, pointed to the ancestral trees, the wide lake, the smiling villages, the parish church, whence at that moment the bells were pouring fourth a joyous peal in honour of the

return of the heir of those broad lands, and said, in a slow and impressive manner—

“Edmund, if ever in a moment of infatuation it should have crossed your mind to ask my consent to your marriage with a Roman Catholic, dismiss at once and for ever that thought, for I swear,” and he laid his hand on the large family Bible which was placed on the table, “by that sacred book, and that Heaven which it reveals, never to grant it. I have made your mother promise not to hear one word from you on this subject, or even to allow you to name to her the person, whoever she may be, who has suggested to your mind the possibility of such a marriage. Now we understand each other.”

He laid his hand on his son's shoulder. If he could have read into that son's heart, even his own stern spirit might have quailed.

After Mr. Neville had left the room, Edmund remained gazing on the well-known scenes, which

even in their wintry garb were clothed in so much beauty. There was not a spot which did not remind him of his childhood, or of his boyhood, and the wild moaning of the wind through the leafless branches of the elm trees was in his ears as the music of bygone days. The sound of the gong, as it startled him from his attitude of contemplation, had also a familiar tone, and in his own room the views of the Lake of Killarney, and of the Giant's Causeway, the crooked China monsters on the chimney, the few books and old pamphlets on the shelves, the embroidered screens, his sister's birth-day present, all carried him back to a time and a state of things he had almost lost sight of during the year he had spent in Italy. He went down to dinner, and in the old family portraits, the sword hanging over the chimney, (a relic of the battle of the Boyne) which he had often in his infancy climbed on a chair to handle, the large picture between the windows of the siege

of Londonderry, all served to warn him of the deeply-rooted religious and political prejudices of his family. He was silent and abstracted, and the conversation was chiefly sustained by his father and the clergyman of the parish. It often touched on the state of the country, and the religious animosity which prevailed in it. His heart sank within him as he listened to the bitterness of party feeling, which appeared in every word that was uttered; and when in the family prayers that night, Mr. Neville solemnly implored that his household and home might ever be preserved from the inroads of infidelity and popery, and never harbour a Papist among them, the image of Ginevra rose before him as she had stood, with her meek and fervent eyes raised to Heaven, pleading with him the cause of truth and of eternity. The next day he rode with his sister, Anne Neville, through the lanes and the villages which lay within his father's estates, and was cordially wel-



comed by the tenants. When he observed all that had been done to promote the comfort and the welfare of the inhabitants, and listened to the various details she gave of the schools which she superintended, of the new church which they were building in one spot, and the cottages they were erecting or improving in another, and watched her intelligent and animated countenance while she was speaking, he felt a new interest in the place, and a new sympathy with her. Anne Neville was one of those persons who, without any brilliant qualities or extraordinary charm, carry with them, through all the details of life, a quiet gaiety, a calm good sense, and a degree of modified and gentle obstinacy, that works its way and gains its end where more exalted or more dazzling qualities and powers might fail. She had more kindness than feeling, and more perseverance than zeal. She observed to the utmost the duties of her religion, and had little indul-

gence or sympathy for those who believed, or who practised more or less than herself. Without any vanity, (for praise and blame seemed equally indifferent to her), she had the very highest respect for her own understanding, and anything she did not herself discern, or feel, or conceive, was unhesitatingly set down as enthusiasm, or delusion, or perverseness. She never seemed to imagine that there might be depths in the human heart which she had never fathomed, needs in the human spirit which she had never experienced, bearings and relations between creeds and actions which she had never investigated, or indeed that there were more things in Heaven and Earth than were dreamt of in her philosophy. Too gentle in character to be ever violent in her expressions, too upright to be uncharitable in her judgments, she quietly brushed away from her path, and put aside from her consideration, everything that did not precisely tally with her own pre-considered opinions.

A clever American writer\* has said that there are some points of belief which we must not be always reconsidering, but which must at once be placed on our shelves for daily use, and not for critical examination. Anne Neville's opinions were *all* of that nature, and there was no apparent crevice through which a new impression could have been inserted in her well-arranged, but closely packed understanding. That Edmund should have sympathised with his sister may seem extraordinary; but who has not felt that when they have suffered much through the intensity of their feelings, or the vividness of their fancy, there is a strange repose in the quiet round of daily duty, and of practical interests, which a well-regulated life presents. His love for Ginevra was connected with recollections of vehement joy, and of passionate emotion; her religion was the obstacle that stood between him and happiness;

\* Jacob Abbott.

the source of acute misery to himself, and of tormenting anxiety for the future. He was capable of, but had no taste for strong excitements, and he easily persuaded himself that it was to Ginevra's religious creed he felt a rising repugnance, and not merely to the difficulties it placed in his way. There is so much that is excellent and attractive in any form of earnest religion, and old habits and associations have so much influence on the human mind and heart, that as he looked upon Anne with admiration and interest, he conceived an ardent desire, which soon amounted to a strong conviction, that his wife might be brought to adopt her views, and embrace the religion of her sister-in-law. He could not contemplate without dismay the possibility of foregoing, or risking the possession of those hereditary estates, which appeared to him more valuable than they had ever done before ; and as he observed increasing proofs of the inflexibility of his father's character, and

felt himself every day becoming more incompetent to contend against that iron rigidity of purpose ; or even supposing the will to be equally powerful in both, he was conscious that in the struggle, all the advantages of position were against himself. Now, then, for the first time, the idea suggested itself to his mind that *Ginevra must give way*. He remembered how young she was ; he tried to persuade himself that her convictions were not deeply rooted, and that the example of others, his earnest solicitations, and the force of circumstances, might, after a short time, effect the result he so ardently desired. So confident did he feel of success, that his spirits rose, and he amused his imagination with various pictures of the time when he should declare his marriage to the astonished world, and bring Ginevra home in triumph to his delighted family. His first step was to write to Walter Sydney, and propose to pay him a visit at Heron Castle. There were some matters of business

pending between their two families, concerning the lands of Darrell-court, that were adjacent to Mr. Sydney's, which furnished a plausible pretext for this proposal. He felt an intense curiosity to see Ginevra's father and sister, and an inexpressible interest in observing all the peculiarities of that house in which she was so soon to be received under such strange circumstances.

Reckless as he was, he could not divest himself of a nervous reluctance to enter Colonel Leslie's house as a common acquaintance; and this, combined perhaps with an involuntary misgiving on Walter's part, occasioned the delay in his introduction, which had so much tantalised Margaret at the outset of their acquaintance. When he met her at Mr. Thornton's, the sound of her voice, and something peculiar in her expression, which reminded him strongly of his wife, almost baffled his self-command. When Walter's accident forcibly brought about his domestication at

Grantley Manor, he shook off these feelings, and applied himself to the closest scrutiny of the characters, the feelings, and the opinions which would be likely to influence Ginevra, and to tell on her actions. Margaret especially, he watched with unremitting attention; but it was an attention so wholly selfish — his thoughts were so entirely absorbed by his own cares and projects, that it never once occurred to him that he was attaching her to himself and endangering her peace of mind. Once he was on the point of confiding to her his perilous secret, but rejoiced that, by leaving him abruptly, she had saved him from committing what, on subsequent reflection, appeared to him in the light of a fatal imprudence. Once, too, he was inclined to consult Walter Sydney; but he, too, had checked the communication he was about to make to him, and the estrangement between them, that had begun soon after his arrival at Grantley, deepened so visibly,

that he soon forsook all idea of imparting to him the truth. And when in those brief moments of intercourse with Ginevra, which he could contrive to obtain after her arrival, he felt with a kind of helpless despair, that, devoted, tender, humble, and patient as she was, ready to bear everything from him, and everything for him, on the one point on which his hopes and his projects turned he spent his strength in vain; that his desperate efforts, his cold resolution, his fiery resentment, his subtle reasonings, and his passionate entreaties, swept over her constancy like the spray over the rock, leaving traces of its passage indeed, secret tears and silent pangs, but making no way, and gaining no hold; when he saw this, he rejoiced, with a sense of escape from danger, that to no one had he confided the secret of the ties that bound them. He had tried her by every means in his power, and utterly failed. Jealous, restless, and miserable, he could scarcely bear his



existence or command his impatience. He loved her with passion, and to leave her was misery ; and yet to stay, and day by day conceal his feelings, and watch her at a distance, and scarcely dare approach her, or for one moment fix his eyes upon her, or linger by her side—this was a torment he could scarcely endure. That his father should conquer in their trial of strength was conceivable, and irritating as he felt it, he could scarcely wonder at the result ; but that that gentle creature, all sweetness and submission, —that child of seventeen, whose heart was so entirely his,—should baffle and thwart him, and triumph over all his efforts to subdue her resolution and force her compliance, caused him at times such transports of rage, that he almost doubted if it was not hatred rather than love that he felt for her. But when he thought of going, of leaving that house in which she lived, that place where he could at least see her, hear her

voice, and give way to alternate outbursts of anger and of tenderness, then he felt, by the pang that wrung his heart, that he loved her too deeply, too ardently, for the peace of his selfish and impetuous spirit. Her devotion to her father, her tenderness for her sister, her intimacy with Walter, the admiration she inspired to casual visitors, and the tone in which she was addressed in spite of the reserve of her manners, as one at liberty to receive the homage and the attentions of others, were all sources of indescribable torment to him. It appeared as if every one about her had greater claims upon her than himself, and yet he was her husband; if he chose it, he might at once snatch her from that house, separate her from her family, and assert his right to her exclusive devotion. Sometimes he persuaded himself, in his suspicious irritation, that she did not wish their marriage to be declared,—that she had ceased to love him,—and that, despising him for his selfish

cowardice, she felt satisfied with her present position, and willing to cast him off for ever. Her very patience and sweetness angered him ; and sometimes he, the deceiver and the tyrant, would think of himself as injured and ill-used by his victim, because she only suffered in silence, and wept in secret.

On the day that preceded his departure from Grantley Manor, which was alluded to in the last chapter, he had received a letter from his sister, which mysteriously hinted at a report that had reached his parents, and thrown them into the greatest consternation. She entreated him to return at once to Clantoy, and relieve their minds from the suspense they were enduring. Perplexed and distracted, he resolved partly to confide in his uncle, Mr. Warren, and informed him of his attachment to Ginevra, slightly alluding to some previous acquaintance he had formed with her in Italy, and consulting him on the best mode of

obtaining his father's consent to their marriage. He found his own impression of his father's inflexibility tenfold confirmed in this conversation, but at the same time a strong confidence expressed in the likelihood of Ginevra's conversion to the Protestant faith, if the urgency of the case was placed before her, and suffered to gain upon her mind by imperceptible degrees. Edmund's hopes were revived by this view of the subject; he began to hope that others might wield this engine of persuasion more effectually than himself, and he determined to leave the case in Mr. Warren's hands, while, in accordance with his sister's wishes, he himself for awhile returned to Ireland. But when he met Ginevra on the terrace of the park, on the evening of that day, and they stood alone together, with the dark wintry sky over their heads, and the gloomy future weighing on their hearts, the conflicts of grief and passion, of love and anger, burst all bounds. Her spirit rose

in that hour, and the smothered fire which had mouldered so long in her breast, kept under by nights of prayer and days of struggle, broke forth at last, and the passion of her Italian nature shook, and almost convulsed her fragile form. As, in her own tongue, she poured forth the story of her wrongs, and shuddered herself as she told it, deep, deep into her own heart and into his she dived, and brushed aside, with impetuous and overpowering reasoning, the vain subterfuges by which he sought to keep the truth from her grasp ; unrolled the past before his shrinking glance ; and then, with his hand in her's, and pointing to Heaven with the other, exclaimed—

“And when at the last judgment-seat you stand, how shall you answer to Him who made you, for having tempted a human soul into destruction ? No, Edmund, no,” she continued, while a torrent of tears fell on his hand, which she still clasped with both her's. “No ! you will

never have to answer for such a crime. The day will come when you will bless God that I could withstand your tears, and wring your heart.”

She left him abruptly, for the sound of footsteps had that moment startled them: but he was going the next day, and her conscience reproached her for her vehemence, and her heart smote her for what, in her sensitive tenderness, she called unkindness. Through that long evening, not one glance of affection could she obtain—not one token of pardon. She longed to kneel at his feet, and she could not even meet his eyes, or address to him a word. As the time of withdrawal drew near, her misery and her anxiety knew no bounds. When the dog, the old dog that had been the favourite companion of their walks, and the object of their care during the first weeks of their marriage, broke into the room, she felt as if he had come to plead for her, in that their first hour of real estrangement, and through the verses which

she addressed to that mute intercessor, she made an appeal to the heart which pride and resentment had closed. The well-known air, which he so often had sung with her in her brief days of happiness, and the words of which formed an answer to her prayer, was a pledge of reconciliation. They met again, and the tears that were shed by both, and the silent pardon which each asked and obtained from the other, and a few faint expressions of hope on his side, and words of patience, of trust, and of tenderness on her's, and a long embrace, and a mute farewell, and that page of life was turned over; and the stormy interview with Margaret that followed it, opened a new era in Ginevra's singular existence.

## CHAPTER XII.

ON board the vessel which was carrying him from England to Ireland Edmund Neville stood, and as it approached the port where he was to land, he gazed on the fanciful forms of the clouds which were gathering round the sinking sun, and then on the light waves that were breaking quietly on the shore, and the repose of nature seemed in strange disaccordance with the feelings of his own breast. There was not a single point in the past or in the future on which his mind could rest with any sense of repose, and he looked forward with painful uneasiness to his arrival at Clantoy, and to the questions which might be put to him in consequence of the reports to which his sister alluded. *If the truth* had been rumoured abroad



in some unaccountable manner, and had reached the ears of his family, what would be the result? A sickening doubt of his own rectitude crept over him. If everything should be at stake, and ruin stare him in the face, what should he do? What was there in himself, what steady principle, or what noble impulse, to set against the temptation of denying his marriage, of staining his honour with a falsehood? He searched his own heart; he questioned his own spirit; he weighed them in the balance, and found them wanting. Not even his affection could stand against the opposing force of selfish interest, and there was not one grain of principle to throw into the scale. It is a bitter thing to commune with one's own secret soul, and turn from it with contempt,—to see the stormy passions that swell about the heart, lulled into repose in some hour of solitary thought,—and then, through the still waters, to gaze into the depths of the abyss, and see the reflection of our own deadly

selfishness. When, on landing at Belfast, Edmund threw himself into the carriage-and-four which was waiting for him, the rapid motion and the nearer approach to the scene of contest and struggle which he was anticipating, renewed the agitation of his spirits, and over and over again he rehearsed a series of stormy discussions, of charges repulsed, of questions evaded, of menaces resisted, of resolutions taken, and strong will pitched against strong will in fierce and close encounter. Although the night was cold, he was in such a state of feverish excitement, that the wind that blew from the sea as he travelled along the coast was only refreshing to him, and the horses that were going at the rate of ten miles an hour seemed to him to linger on the road. As he was stopping to change horses at a little inn about seven miles from Clantoy, a man on horseback approached the carriage, and he recognised the voice of his cousin Charles Neville, a young cler-

gyman whose living was within a few miles of Clantoy, but whom he had not seen during his last visit to Ireland.

“May I come into the carriage, Edmund? I must speak to you,” he said in a hurried manner, and the step was let down, and as he jumped in, he was heard to desire the postboy to go on as fast as possible. His hand, when he pressed Edmund’s, shook, and he could at first scarcely find voice to speak to him; but the words came at last, and suddenly and fearfully did they turn the current of excited feeling which was swelling in his companion’s breast. That will which he had come to withstand, that iron resolution which had stood between him and his object, that violence he had meant to oppose by equal violence, or to deceive by ingenious evasions, was powerless, subdued, and silenced for ever by one mightier than itself. A rapid illness had carried off Mr. Neville after twenty-four hours of suffering, and twenty-four

subsequent ones of sensible and rapidly-increasing exhaustion, and the messenger who had been sent to summon his son to Clantoy had missed him on the road. A cry of bitter anguish—a groan of horror—burst from the heaving breast of the startled and bewildered Edmund: he grasped convulsively Charles Neville's hand, and neither spoke nor moved, and scarcely thought during that hour's journey. He felt as if in a dream, so sudden had been the revolution in his state of mind; there was a sensation of weight on his breast, with a sharp pang of self-reproach, and then vague suggestions of selfish anxiety, dimly flitting like shadows in the mental vision, and driven away from the soul and brain by the force of present anguish and remorseful terror. Through the scenes which awaited him, in the desolation of that home, in the midst of the affliction which he witnessed and shared, still that state of feeling pursued him, only that on the

canvas of that present affliction, more and more distinctly rose the personal fears, and hopes, and solitudes, which now thrust themselves forward with resistless prominence. In his sister's manner, usually so calm even in hours of strong emotion, there was a degree of restless perturbation which struck him peculiarly. She did not seem absorbed in her affliction, as his mother was, though the expression of her countenance indicated much suffering, and her bursts of sorrow occasionally revealed how deeply she mourned; but her mind seemed intent on something besides her grief, and her eyes were so frequently fixed upon her brother with a kind of anxious scrutiny, that he would sometimes leave the room to avoid that silent investigation. He knew that she had been for some months past engaged to marry Charles Neville, and he felt a sort of impatient astonishment at the way in which he himself seemed to be a greater object of interest

to her than her future husband, and at the pertinacious manner in which she sought his society, and, as he thought, endeavoured to insinuate herself into his confidence. As the moment approached when the will on which his whole fate depended was to be opened, his nervous irritation increased to such a degree that he could hardly remain in the house, and wandered for hours on the banks of the lake, or across the adjoining moors. Sometimes he felt an impulse to question Anne on the subject of his father's last impressions regarding his marriage, and on the nature of the report which she had spoken of in her own letter ; but the very solicitude with which she seemed to seize on any opening that led to this subject, gave him a misgiving, and deepened his reserve. When he spoke of the future, and alluded to any plan connected with his taking possession of the estates, a cloud passed over her face ; and he had once seen her glance at Charles Neville with an indefinable

expression, which so haunted him on the following night, that he was on the point of seeking her room, waking her out of her sleep, and calling upon her to give up her secret thoughts, and relieve him, if she could, from the weight of intolerable suspense. But his pride forbade it ; he could not easily suspect the sister whose kindness and affection he had never doubted, and of whose high principles and disinterestedness he had seen many proofs, of any selfish or mercenary thoughts ; but still he could not endure to humble himself before her by betraying his own, and whenever she seemed disposed to lead to the subject, he shut himself up in silence and reserve. The day came at last on which Mr. Neville's will was to be opened and read in the presence of the connections of the family, and the lawyers appointed for the purpose. Edmund was perfectly calm—he had mastered his anxiety, at least to outward appearance, and with his hands crossed

on his chest, and his eyes fixed on the ground, he listened to the instrument which was to decide his fate, without moving a muscle, or giving any other sign of interest than a respectful attention. Pride and a sense of the importance of self-command at that instant gave him strength for the occasion; but his heart was beating a hundred to the minute, and when the preliminary sentences had been read, and through the legal technicalities that preceded it the real import of the will became apparent, a feeling of faintness came over him, which was combated by an effort that seemed almost to stop his respiration. Everything that for years had been possessed by his family, the townlands of Clantoy and Eskerreen, in Ireland, with their rent-rolls of ten and twenty thousand a year; Darrell-court and its dependencies, in the county of —, in England; a small estate in Scotland; a house in Cavendish-square, in London; and other minor bequests



accompanying these, were successively and pompously enumerated, and all were left to him to hold and to keep at his pleasure, and to descend to his children after him, under proviso and condition that if he remained unmarried or died without heirs, the said estates and properties, &c., should devolve to Anne Neville, his sister, and to her heirs after her; or in the event of his marrying or declaring a marriage with a person professing the Roman Catholic religion, that he should at once forfeit the possession of the said estates, properties, &c., and that they should at such time pass into the hands of the said Anne Neville, or her life failing, to her children after her, or her heirs failing, to Charles Neville, of —, and to his heirs after him. It is said that when a sentence of death is pronounced upon a man, he is neither as much agitated or as much shocked, as the spectators of his trial. The fact is, that he scarcely realises its meaning, nor can he pre-

sent to his own mind its full bearing. In the same way, what Edmund Neville had so much dreaded, that his days had been restless and his nights sleepless, had now come upon him, and he scarcely felt more agitated when he left, than when he had entered the room an hour before. He had not raised his eyes once during the time which it had taken to read the will; and when an old squire who was distantly related to him shook hands with him, as they passed through the hall into the drawing-room, and whispered,—“Aye, a chip of the old block. A Protestant to the back-bone. No Popish wife, hey?” the blood which rushed to his heart, did not even tinge his cheek. That evening, one of the lawyers who had been present observed to the clergyman at whose house he drank tea, that it was easy to see by Mr. Charles Neville’s varying colour, and the attention with which he watched his cousin, and the way he fidgeted

in his chair, that the purport of the will was not a matter of indifference to him; and he added, that Mr. Edmund Neville seemed so very unconcerned in the minor details, and so absorbed in his own thoughts, that he was evidently well satisfied, and not at all surprised at its provisions.

When Edmund had watched the last person leave the house, and stood alone opposite to the blazing fire in the old-fashioned saloon, he leant his head against the chimney, and gazed on the curling and sparking flame with a dull sense of misery, which seemed gradually to invade and take possession of his mind. He felt, at that moment, utterly incapable of defining clearly to himself his own position, and still more of adopting at once the only honourable course he could now pursue; on the contrary, he saw no safety but in a desperate effort to conceal his marriage, at least, till he had time to consider fully all

the bearings of the subject, and employed every means, and used every effort, by prayers, by threats, by all the powers which her youth and love had placed in his hands, to persuade or to compel Ginevra to renounce her religion. This was the tacit purpose of his mind, the single ray of hope that crossed it. Her unbounded devotion to himself, her implicit submission to his will on all points but the one on which he had hitherto found her intractable, seemed to afford a chance of eventual success, or at least grounds of security against any immediate disclosure on her part of the secret ties that bound them, which delay would give him time to work effectually on her fears and on her hopes. Drops of cold sweat started to his brow as he thought of the consequences of a sudden emotion, an unguarded expression on her part. By a strange process of self-deception, his own assumption of a fortune and a position which he had in reality

forfeited, and which he could only retain by a dishonourable silence, appeared to him in the light of a justifiable resistance to a revolting injustice, and to defeat its object by every means in his power, a simple act of self-defence ; and yet, by an equally strange inconsistency, he felt it absolutely necessary to guard against any circumstances that might open Ginevra's eyes, and awaken scruples, which, once aroused, would baffle all his sophistry, and enlist against him the uncompromising rectitude of her character. He instinctively felt this, and writhed under the consciousness. In the whole range of human suffering, there is not perhaps a more irritating description of feeling than that experienced by a wholly undisciplined spirit, in its unavailing struggle against the force of circumstances too powerful to be controlled, and too galling to be endured. Edmund's worst enemy might have pitied him in that hour, for he was not only smarting under

disappointment, harassed with anxiety, and leaning for support on a single hope, which had already been repeatedly deceived, and to which he clung with the desperate tenacity of a drowning man; but he was also parting at that moment with his own illusions about himself. Life was tearing from him that fictitious character which had so long, even in his own eyes, hung about him and flattered him into self-complacency. Henceforth his admiration of what was good and great would be a mockery of his own course. The generous impulses that all, even the most hardened, experience at times, would re-act on his own soul like the impotent efforts that are made in a dream, and Ginevra would be no more to him like a ministering angel at his side, but as an angel standing at the entrance of an earthly paradise, and forbidding him to enter. It was not that he formed at that time any deliberate project of retaining in the end, and under false pretences, a

fortune which now legally devolved on his sister. He had a vain feeling that if Ginevra ultimately refused to give way in the trial of strength which was about to be engaged between his passions and her principles, the whole must be surrendered; but he clung to that hope with a tenacity which blinded him to all ulterior consequences, and made him reckless of all future embarrassments. Unable himself to conceive the nature or intensity of her religious convictions, he considered the whole question as one of personal influence, and it was on the strength or the weakness of her affections that he alternately reckoned with exultation or looked with apprehension. This added a fresh source of torment and disquietude to his already sufficiently trying situation, for he passionately loved his wife, and persuaded himself that if she finally withstood his threats and his entreaties, that it would be a proof of coldness of heart or of indifference to himself.

At that moment a deep sigh startled him from his reverie, and turning round he saw his sister seated in a chair close to him, and watching him, as usual, with an anxious expression.

“For Heaven’s sake, Anne!” he exclaimed, in a hurried manner, “do not follow me about the house in that silent manner, and with that mournful countenance. I wish to be alone, and—”

“Edmund,” she interrupted gently, “do not send me away so unkindly? Brother, dear brother!”

She laid her head on his shoulder and burst into tears; but quickly recovering herself, she continued—

“I have suffered much lately, or I should not be so weak; but, Edmund, I *must* speak to you—I must implore you to have patience with me.”

“Is there anything in which I can serve you, Anne? If there is, mention it at once. There is nothing I would not do for you or for my mother.”



“No, Edmund, it is of yourself I would speak, and—”

“Then I beg that you will be silent.”

“It is for your sake I would speak,” she said firmly, and recovering her self-possession.

“Believe me, that truth and openness, and an honest purpose, would serve your interests far better than ——,” she seemed to hesitate as to the word to be used, “than reserve.”

“I do not understand you,” he replied, in a cold and haughty manner.

“Cannot you understand me?” she continued, without looking at him; “if you really do not, then I thank God for it. If henceforward your course is simple and clear, and there is no struggle in your breast, though suffering there may be,—if no irrevocable step has been taken—”

He turned fiercely round, and this time his face could not conceal the horrible agitation of his soul; and if she had raised her eyes, she

must have perceived it, but they were fixed on the fire, and she continued—

“If you can assume your present position with an approving conscience—”

“Anne,” he vehemently exclaimed; “Anne, I have no patience for such language as this; and if ever you venture to speak to me again in this manner, it will be the signal of an eternal separation between us. I am sorry for your disappointment,” he added, with a bitter sneer; “you had, no doubt, intended to gratify Charles Neville with the first intelligence of his future prospects, and with the success of this, your *sisterly* mission; but I am obliged to deceive your hopes, and to baffle your generous intentions in my favour and in his.”

This implied accusation restored at once to Anne Neville her ordinary self-possession. She became as calm as contempt can make one, and gazed on her brother with a feeling of pity that

took from her all angry emotion. She answered coldly—

“I care not to repel a charge which is either an ebullition of temper worthy of a froward child, or a proof that you are utterly incapable of appreciating the character or the feelings which an experience of more than twenty years, which the remembrances of childhood, and the intercourse of maturer years, might have made you acquainted with. That you have thrown a bitter ingredient into my present cup of sorrow, and effaced, as by one stroke, the sweet confidence of affection which once existed between us, may one day cause you regret, and if ever—do not go till I have said this, for I *must* say it, and then set you at liberty from my presence—if ever you should feel that the burthen of a secret trial, or an overpowering difficulty, or the reproaches of your conscience meet you at every turn in your life and cause you intolerable suffering, then think of

me, and of my words. Perhaps your own heart will have whispered to you in the meantime, that mine was not one likely to be swayed by a mean and disgraceful selfishness."

As she left the room without offering him her hand, or even looking at him, Edmund's heart sunk within him. For one moment he thought of calling her back, of throwing himself into her arms, of opening his whole heart to her, and a dim and distant vision of an honourable life of exertion and of sacrifice, begun in principle and ending in honour, floated before him. Perhaps Anne might never marry, and devote herself to him and his, and they might all live together, and then her influence over his wife might in the end be successful, and work conviction where persuasion and violence had failed. His heart seemed to soften and expand with this idea, and he moved towards the door with slow and irresolute steps; as he crossed the hall he looked up and

saw Anne walking up and down the gallery, and speaking in a low voice, but in an earnest manner, to Charles Neville, whose arm was round her waist. His dream vanished, his suspicions returned, his heart hardened again, and the practical details of business, and petty exercises of authority in which he was soon involved, riveted with a thousand links the chains which fettered him to the course he had taken. He had not written to Ginevra since his departure from Grantley Manor, and now the moment was come when he must address to her the first intelligence of the fatal complication in which they were involved. It would have been natural that in a moment of such importance to the whole of their future lives, and of such keen suffering to himself, he should have disclosed to her without restraint or concealment, the exact nature of the difficulties in which he found himself so unexpectedly entangled ; but, in the first place, there did not exist

between them those habits of confidential intercourse which, under ordinary circumstances, spring up by a kind of moral necessity between husband and wife. The romantic and painful secrecy which had attended their married life, had established between them a strange reserve which had gradually deepened in proportion as time elapsed and their trials increased. The short moments of intercourse which were allowed them, were spent in conflicts of feeling and scenes of emotion which carried them beyond the sphere of everyday life ; while her youth, her inexperience, and her difficult position made her reluctant to press upon him questions which always appeared to embarrass him, and which he generally evaded with a gloomy countenance, or attempted to parry by evasive replies. In the present instance, he felt it more absolutely necessary than ever to keep her in ignorance of the exact nature of the circumstances under which he was acting ; so

strong was his conviction, that with all her gentleness and ignorance, there was that in her character which, if once the case was fairly put before her, would overpower all his sophistry and break through the restraints she had hitherto submitted to. The time was therefore come, when truth and falsehood, love and fear, were to wield their keenest weapons, their most powerful engines. His heart smote him as he wrote the warrant that was to commit her to fresh sufferings, to prolonged trials; his hand trembled and tears started to his eyes; but the courage of selfishness is great, and he subdued his better feelings with the steady resolution with which some war against their bad passions,—or perhaps he persuaded himself that it was for her sake as well as his own that he must urge upon her acceptance, and even compel her to agree to, the only course that would place her as well as himself, in a position such as it would

be his pride and his happiness to behold her occupy.

Grantley Manor had been very gay that week ; so it was reported among the neighbours, so it was recorded in the county newspaper. There had been one night a ball, and dancing had been kept up till daybreak ; another night charades had been acted, and the lovely daughters of the hospitable owner (so the article went) had enchanted a select audience with their various talents for music, for acting, and for scenic pantomime, in which graceful amusements they had been joined by the amiable daughters of the Earl of Donnington, and all the fashionable young men in the neighbourhood. The first check which the amusements of the assembled party had experienced was by the sudden departure of Mr. and Mrs. Warren, occasioned by the unexpected announcement of Mr. Neville's death. It was on the morning after the ball that he drew Ginevra



aside, and communicated to her the intelligence which was likely to tell so decisively on her future destiny. Shocked and agitated, she remained silent, and saw him depart without venturing to ask the question which was trembling on her lips, but that seemed to choke her in the utterance, "Would this event remove or lighten the difficulties in Edmund's path?"

The days of suspense that followed were almost insupportable, and it required all the energy of Ginevra's singular character to command the agitation of her spirits, and the intensity of her anxiety. But since the scene with her sister, which had seemed to open a new state of things between them, she had a powerful stimulus to action, which roused all the capabilities of her nature. That sister's happiness became an object of passionate solicitude, and she watched every turn of her countenance, and every inflexion of her voice, as the merchant whose all is at the

mercy of the wind and the waves, watches the clouds that gather in the distance, or the gusts that career over the ocean. As to herself, she could not fathom the extent of the trials that awaited her; but with a patient recklessness she lived on from day to day, like one who follows the narrow path with a precipice on either side, and never suffers his eye to rest, but on the next step he is about to take. The music that resounded in her ears, the scenes she was required to act, the songs which were allotted to her, and the applause which followed each exertion of her talents, seemed all a part of the pageant of life, and beneath it rolled a deep and ever-increasing sense of misery, which was stemmed and repressed by an ever-increasing strength; and sometimes, when her eye rested on Margaret, and a bright smile glanced across a face which seemed made for smiles, or when, in the might of her own inspiration, she imparted to her a spark of that fire

which fed her own genius, and saw others gaze with admiration at the beautiful countenance of her sister, when, lighted up by a sympathetic excitement, a sensation of pleasure stole over her own heart, and re-acted on her own spirits. And Margaret was watching too—darkly and heavily had weighed on her soul the suspicions, the evidence, of that fatal night—and wild was the tumult of emotion that followed it.

When Ginevra had left the room with Mr. Warren on the morning so often alluded to, she sat drawing with a feverish application, and an aching, throbbing sensation in her breast; she could not analyse her own feelings, or form any plan of conduct for the future; and to all Maud Vincent's playful inquiries, or serious remarks, she could oppose nothing but a gloomy silence.

Maud, whose temper was good, though sharp, and who really felt for her, at last gave up the attempt in despair, and hastily seizing on a port-

folio of drawings which Margaret had laid on the table, she began to turn them over with a careless impatience. One of them seemed to draw her notice more than the rest, and she held it up to the light and examined it with attention.

“ Who drew this likeness of Ginevra ? ” she asked at last.

“ What do you mean ? There is no likeness of her that I know of,” answered Margaret peevishly, for she felt provoked at the pertinacious manner in which Maud seemed to harp on that now acutely painful subject.

“ Why, if that is not a likeness, I do not know what is ! ” she exclaimed, and threw the drawing before Margaret’s eyes.

The resemblance was so striking, that no one could deny it ; and at first Margaret looked at the sketch with a sort of vague bewilderment ; but in another instant, a whole chain of recollections flashed on her mind—it was her own draw-

ing, corrected and altered by Edmund Neville on the evening after Ginevra's approaching arrival had been made known at Grantley. Quick as lightning her thoughts flew back to that period, and recalled to her a number of circumstances bearing upon this one. She could not take her eyes off the paper, and unused to command her agitation, she betrayed it so visibly, that Maud exclaimed—

“ Why, my dear girl, what is it makes you turn scarlet, and look as if you were going to cry? I am very unlucky in my remarks this morning. Every minute I get into some scrape or other. Is it the sight of your sister's demure countenance that sends the blood up into your temples as well as into your cheeks? If you had been caught sketching Mr. Neville's handsome face, you could not have blushed more desperately. Come, Margaret, do not be foolish; is this your drawing, as you said all these were; or does a tale hang on this particular performance? ”

“O, it is nothing!” said Margaret, with a forced smile. “Put them all back, Maud; we must walk now.”

“Anything to get rid of me this morning, I suppose—

‘O woman, in our hours of ease,  
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please!’

well, ‘when pain and sorrow wring my brow,’ Margaret, I hope you will be a ‘ministering angel,’ for you are hard enough to please now. Let me show this wonderful picture to Mr. Sydney; I hear his voice in the library.”

“No,” said Margaret, impetuously; “give it me, Maud—give it me, I entreat you!” Her gesture was so imperious, and her voice so imploring, that Maud yielded up the drawing without further contest, and only shrugged her shoulders with an expression of impatience, and muttered—

“Well! it is clear enough now, that thereby hangs a tale, and a long one too, like one of Mr.

Thornton's longest. "Make haste, Margaret," she added, louder, as Walter approached the table; "put up your mysterious picture, and hide it from all indiscreet observers."

"Has Margaret *any* mysteries?" said Walter with a kind smile, which was soon changed to a grave expression as he observed her evident annoyance, and the quick manner with which she drew together her drawing materials, and hastened out of the room without speaking.

"Margaret's temper is strangely altered," said Maud, when the door had closed upon her.

"Her temper is strangely tried," answered Walter, who had observed the sort of half friendly and half teasing persecution which Maud carried on. She understood what he meant, and answered carelessly—

"Yes, I am afraid she is sadly in love with Edmund Neville;" and having planted a sting in more bosoms than one in the space of an hour,

she took up a French novel, and with her feet on the fender, and her hand on the back of an arm-chair, she devoted the rest of the morning to this engrossing occupation. Meanwhile, Margaret had followed up, in the solitude of her own room, the train of thought which had been suggested by the sight of Edmund's drawing, and a kind of half instinctive, half indistinct presentiment whispered to her that her sister was more sinned against than sinning, and awakened in her mind an intense desire to ascertain the truth, and to clear up the mystery which hung about her actions.

From the moment that this idea took possession of her mind, she felt less overwhelmed with disappointment and annoyance; the last twelve hours had been the most painful she had ever spent. Her love for Edmund had not been withered by slow degrees, but blighted by a sudden and violent stroke. It still throbbed with lingering life, although the cold chill of



destruction was rapidly gaining upon it. It was still alive in her heart, for she could feel it die, and its last struggles testified to the strength of its previous existence. She had been mysteriously, solemnly, charged on the peril of her soul's safety never to think of him, and nothing had filled the space which that one ceaseless thought had occupied. Now there was an engrossing and unselfish interest sprung up in her mind, connected with him, and at the same time divested of the softening character which the indulgence of her own feelings would have attached to it. And thus those two young girls entered on that life of gaiety which their home presented; each with an aching heart, each keeping aloof from the other, hand in hand in spirit, with a steady purpose in view, and a deep and ever-present interest in one another. Maud Vincent with all her lynx-eyed curiosity, Walter Sydney with all his sympathetic intelligence, could not

read that riddle, or solve the secret of that strange position.~ One day there was, that Ginevra was sitting by Colonel Leslie while he was drawing a plan of operations for some Indian campaign, while Sir Charles D'Arey, a young officer quartered in the neighbourhood, was standing behind her chair and watching its progress: a servant came up and put a letter into her hand. Colonel Leslie looked up and smiled as she left his side; "Something about the charades, love," he said carelessly. She smiled in return, and shook her head. That he might never suffer through her had been the most ardent of her prayers, and without a cloud on her brow she gazed on him, as he put his arm round her waist and looked into her eyes, till with a kiss he released her, and she went slowly out of the room. With faltering steps she reached her own. Her heart fainted within her. Hope is sometimes still more difficult to bear than fear, or rather they are so

closely allied, that each borrows from the other its most acute sensations. She broke the seal, and read as follows :—

“So much depends on the spirit in which you will receive and read this letter, that I entreat you to pause before you give way to your feelings, and take it for granted, that blindly to adhere under all circumstances to a predetermined course is the best and highest wisdom. I never felt to love you more than at this moment. All that you have been to me since the first hour of our acquaintance is present to my mind—your gentleness, your heroic patience and generous forbearance under the most trying circumstances. I do full justice to the principles that have guided you throughout. I can even appreciate and respect the resistance which you have hitherto offered to my entreaties on a subject, on which your *feelings* are admirable, but on which an error in judgment misleads

you. When we have adverted to this point, we have neither of us viewed it with sufficient calmness, or in the dispassionate manner which it demands. It is, doubtless, difficult to be calm, when on the decision of another the happiness or the wretchedness of a whole life depends, and when the obstacles that are raised against the only safe and proper course are the result of deplorable error and prejudice. You know well what I allude to ; but I must inform you that the reasons which I formerly urged with such earnestness on your consideration, when I implored you to conform to the religion of your husband and your country, are become tenfold more imperative, from the tenor of my father's will. In short, there is no alternative now between that concession on your part, or such ruin and misery to us both as cannot be calmly contemplated. I will not go over the ground that we have but too often trodden before. I will only repeat that what

I ask of you is no offence against morality ; no abandonment of the service of your Creator—that service which every reasonable creature owes to Him, but which finds its expression in one peculiar form or in another, according to the infinite variety and incidents of climate, of character, and of association, which serve to produce a number of religions, all resulting from one source, and tending to one end, common to all, and needful for all. You received the tenets which at present you hold from early instructors, whose country and whose sympathies are entirely different from those of the land which is now become your home, and in which my interests and my duties are centered. How can you, at your age, have any assurance that what you now believe is not merely the Truth, but the *only* Truth? Why cannot you adopt the religious convictions of your family, of your friends, and of one dearer to you (if you have not deceived me on that point) than

all the world besides? Will you run the risk of ruining me in every sense of the word, on the chance that your early teachers were better informed, and more enlightened, than those friends, of whose virtues and of whose understandings you have yourself such a high opinion. It seems to me, that, viewed in this light, you cannot hesitate any longer in following the line of conduct which alone can rescue us from an abyss of irreparable misery. The state of the case is this: I am not only ruined but dishonoured; unable to meet the most indispensable engagements, or even to look the world in the face again, if, while you persist in professing the Roman Catholic religion, I should acknowledge my marriage. I will never deny what you may choose to proclaim to the world, but this I plainly tell you, that on the day that you disclose this secret, (and I leave you at liberty to do so; this very letter in your hands furnishes you with evidence, and places me at

your mercy,) I shall leave England for ever, and never set eyes on you again. If you persist in your present religious opinions, there are but two alternatives before you; one is a silence which must forbid our meeting but in crowds, or our ever speaking to each other but in fear and trembling. The other is,—an eternal separation, with the consciousness that you have driven your husband from his country and his home—blasted his name, ruined his fortunes, and broken his heart. If the love you have professed to bear me is anything but a deception, or at best an illusion, I cannot doubt what your answer to this letter must be. When I parted from you, Ginevra, our misery seemed complete! How shall we meet again? If you remain blind to reason, obdurate to entreaty, sheltering yourself in a kind of high-wrought enthusiasm, of imaginary martyrdom, which doubtless is its own reward, that misery will sink into insignificance compared with the

anguish I shall experience. I can scarcely command my feelings, or preserve my senses, when I reflect that an obstinate adherence to a bigoted creed alone stands between us, and divides two hearts, which love and religion itself have united. But why do I speak of love? You have never loved me as I love you; you have never suffered as I have done, or I should not now be forced to plead so earnestly for what would have been granted long ago, if you really had felt for me but one particle of the love I feel for you. But now, before you set the seal to our fate, remember that in my family, threats, alas! are not vain words. A fearful example has just proved it, and you will find from bitter experience that mine will have a literal fulfilment if you should drive me to despair. Do not imagine for an instant that you can consult others, or open yourself to your own family on the subject. The slightest hint at the real state of the case between us, is enough to involve



the most fearful consequences. None but myself can fathom the desperate intricacy of my position, and the least step you take in the affair, beyond the most implicit silence, will do the work of destruction as effectually as if you had proclaimed your marriage before the assembled world. And this, I again repeat, you may do, and you will do, if you are indifferent to what becomes of me, or care never to see me again. Ginevra! if you write to me to come to you,—if, with the simplicity of a child, and the tenderness of a woman, you resign yourself to me, and as the Scripture itself directs you, learn of your husband in meekness and in submission ; what days of bliss are in store for us, what a life of happiness before us ! You, who are the only woman I have ever truly loved—you, who have already given me proofs of heroic devotedness, and borne with such gentle patience the strange sufferings of our lot, now that on one hand every blessing is within

our reach, and every misery threatening us on the other—will you hesitate any longer? I ask of you peace—honour—happiness! and will you let an opinion, blindly received and blindly maintained, weigh against the fidelity you vowed to me, the submission you owe me, the love you bear me? Let conscience speak to you unbiassed by prejudice, and if you listen to its voice, this is the last time I shall have to tremble as I send—to tremble as I await—a letter from you. Ever yours,

“EDMUND NEVILLE.”

Ginevra was alone when she read this letter; but if any one could have seen her at that moment, perhaps they would have found it difficult to gain from her countenance a clear insight into the state of her mind. She walked to the door and locked it, and then came back and sat down near the table on which that letter was lying. She started when her hand touched it, as if there was danger

in its contact. Twice she passed her hand over her brow, and then her face flushed violently; suddenly her throat seemed to swell and her chest to heave; with both hands she seized the velvet ribbon round her neck, and tore it asunder. The ring it held flew out and fell at some distance on the floor. She took the letter and read it again, wildly glancing from line to line with a bewildered expression of doubt, of misery, and of fear. When she came to the last sentence, she lighted a candle and held the paper to the flame. It burned slowly, she watched word after word, line after line disappear, till the fire reached her hand; she let it fall, and soon it mingled with the ashes. At that instant Margaret knocked at the door and told her that Mr. and Mrs. Warren were in the drawing-room, having come over to take leave of them before their departure for Germany. When Ginevra entered the room, Mr. Warren was struck with the deadly paleness of her face,

and felt painfully concerned for her; but he guessed not at the depth of the anguish which that face betrayed. It was not, as he imagined, the dream of a girl, that had just been destroyed—it was the whole life of a woman that had been blighted. His wife having accidentally left the room with Margaret, he found himself alone with Ginevra, and with evident embarrassment he endeavoured to address to her a few words of sympathy. This was more than she could bear, the struggle was dreadful; she would have given worlds to break that silence, to question him, to tear the veil from his eyes and from her own, and burst through the shackles which were driving the iron into her soul. But she could not speak and be calm. She could not command the tumultuous throbbing of her heart—she gasped for breath. All traces of colour vanished from her cheeks; her lips were partly open, but did not move. Her breathing was now scarcely discerni-

ble, so profound was the silence of her whole being. It was awful as the stillness that precedes the storm. Mr. Warren said, with hesitation,

“I hear that Edmund is miserable—that his father’s will ——”

The name, the words, fell on her ear—and swift as the hurricane over the ocean, across that silent spirit swept a tide of passion too powerful for the slender frame that quivered with its violence. Her eyes flashed, her breast heaved; over her cheeks, her neck, her temples, rushed the crimson hue of indignant feeling, and words rose to her lips as keen as her anguish—as strong as her despair.

“And what is a man’s will?” she cried with convulsive agitation. “What is a man’s will, that it should sever what God has united? Can the breath of his mouth, the stroke of his pen ——  
A will! a will! What will? In God’s name, Mr. Warren, is it His will or man’s will that

must prevail? Heaven forgive me! I know not what I say,—my brain is giving way.”

She fell on her knees with her face buried in her hands. Love and terror were contending with that indignant passion, and in the fierce conflict every nerve was thrilling, every limb was quivering, every feature working. Like a ship that breasts the waves with every power it can command, she struggled, she fought, she wrestled with that great agony, and at last subdued it. When she lifted her head again, that vehement emotion had subsided. The silence that ensued was like the calm of Nature when the storm has passed away. The tokens of her deep misery, the signs of her bitter anguish, like the floating spars of a wreck on the surface of the stilled ocean, were discernible in her mournful eyes and in her languid step; but the light of heaven was shining again on the waters of affliction, and she was gazing with firmness on their deepening

course. She pressed Mr. Warren's hand as she left him, and wrote the following letter to her husband:—

“I will not reproach you for the past, nor remind you of promises, of assurances, that seem to you now as if they had never been. Of love and of misery I care not to speak. They have sunk too deep into my heart to find vent in words. What can I say to you that I have not said before?—how can I argue when my heart is breaking? But from your letter—your dreadful letter—I appeal to yourself; I call upon your conscience to witness against you. Oh, dearest Edmund, if it is a sin to lie to men, to lie to God is an unpardonable crime. If I was to abjure the faith which is as strong as life within me, if I protested by my acts, and with my lips, against what in my soul I believed—what in my heart I adored,—my very prayers would become

insults to the Majesty of heaven. But is there indeed no alternative but that which you point out?—have I to choose between *my* guilt and *your* despair?

“ Too much, perhaps, till now, I have yielded to your prayers, and blindly resigned my judgment to your’s—proud and glad to suffer at your command, and for your sake. But now you have said too much, and too little. You have awakened fears that may not sleep again, and thoughts which cannot slumber. Vague assertions and mysterious warnings have not strength sufficient to bind me to a silence, which neither the laws of God or of man can warrant you in imposing upon me. The darkness in which you have involved me deepens every hour, and when in despair I would gain light at any price, you scare me with such fearful phantoms, or such dreadful realities, that I pause and shrink, and yield to the terror that besets me. A thousand wild fears



and vague suspicions dart through my mind. I have risen at night, and made my way to the library, and searched in books, and read over laws and statutes, till my head has throbbled with fatigue and anguish. I can nowhere find an explanation of the fate you assign to me. I cannot accept it, Edmund, nor by a sacrilegious lie avert it; and yet I cannot, I dare not say that I have courage to brave your anger, your threatened desertion,—to draw upon you all the misfortunes you speak of. Have mercy upon me, and explain yourself clearly. Prove to me that it is just and honourable to keep our marriage a perpetual secret; that you have the right to do so,—the right to compel me to silence by more fearful threats, by more powerful means, than if you pointed a dagger at my breast. Only prove to me this, Edmund, and I will be silent as the grave, till the day that death will give you freedom, and to me peace. Only, never

forget, as you would not forget your soul's salvation, and your hopes of heaven, that what God has joined together, man cannot put asunder. Remember that I must ever stand between you and other hopes, between you and other ties, as a shade, a cloud, a blighting vision! O that it were not a crime to bid you forget me; that it were not a duty thus to cross your path and embitter your existence. Why it should be so, Edmund, why the pure gold of our love has turned into dross, you alone can tell. Why we cannot, hand in hand, meet with courage the evil days, the coming trials of life, and abandon *all* save truth and virtue, is more than I can conceive; but you terrify me with mysterious allusions, with fearful prognostications. What have you ever done—what can you ever have promised, to warrant such language? Believe me, there is no anger in my heart; only a love which grows wild with its own silence, and reckless of

its own misery ! Have pity on my anguish, and let my sufferings win from you a token of kindness, a patience for my grief. Yours in life and till death,

“ GINEVRA.”

In answer to this letter Mr. Neville sent another ; it was begun in a cold, concise style, evidently written with great bitterness of spirit. He gave no explanations, and offered no further persuasions, but only reiterated his former assurances, sarcastically charging her to follow the dictates of her own conscience, and sacrifice him without hesitation, if her religious scruples required it. He could only assert again, that the inevitable consequences of such an act would be to drive him for ever from his country, and involve him in irretrievable disgrace. At the end of the letter he lost the tone of self-command with which he had begun it, and complained with violence of the coldness of her heart, and of what

he called her indifference to himself. With jealous susceptibility he had brooded over the expressions in her letter, in which she had spoken of a wish to release him from the ties which bound them, and of only claiming his fidelity, on the score of duty, and perversely inferred that she would wish to part with him for ever, and felt no regret at their separation, but from motives of conscience. He announced to her that he was going abroad, and should be absent from England for some months; that change of scene was absolutely necessary to him; and that while she persisted in her present religious opinions, he could foresee no change in their mutual position, except one that would effectually prevent his ever returning to England. He again accused her of want of love for him, and of pity for his sufferings. He alluded to his own ill-health, and begged her to spare her reproaches and recriminations, which almost drove him to madness.

This letter he sent, and then, with his face buried in his hands, gave way to a burst of grief such as he had never before experienced. He pitied himself more than Ginevra, and perhaps he was right. The present and the future were gloomy enough, and there was not a ray of comfort to lighten that darkness. The examination he had made into his affairs had proved to him, beyond a doubt, that if his title to the property was forfeited, such hopeless pecuniary difficulties would beset him, such overwhelming claims for debts already contracted, that his situation would be worse than that of beggary. He had offended and estranged his sister, and already forfeited, in her eyes, and in those of the world, the merit of a ready resignation of the property; and it was with a kind of dogged and sullen determination that he now resolved to maintain himself in his present position as long as a gleam of hope remained that his wife might be brought to change her religion. It was with a

kind of reckless and fierce indifference that he left his fate in her hands ; at the same time there was in his heart a love for her, which added to all the misery he endured. He felt alarmed at the vehement emotion which the sight of her handwriting awakened, and at the relentless hold which his passion for her seemed to take on his feelings. He could see no happiness for himself with or without her ; there was nothing around him, or within him, that could supply the craving for happiness which pursued him. He was right to pity himself, and others pitied him too, when they perceived his altered looks and his care-worn expression. He went, and she remained at Grantley. His last letter had carried conviction to her mind, inso-much that she could no longer doubt that some overwhelming difficulties threatened him, in the event of a disclosure of their marriage. What was the exact nature, or the extent of those difficulties, she could not fathom ; but after much

thought and doubt, and hesitation, she at last resolved to observe, for the present, an absolute silence on the subject. Her resolution was confirmed by a letter, which she received about that time from Father Francesco. It held out hopes to her that, in the course of that year, he would return to Europe, and perhaps visit England on his arrival from America. As he had received permission from his ecclesiastical superiors to reside there awhile, before his return to Italy, this announcement was to Ginevra like a message from heaven, and confirmed her in the purpose she had formed, at the same time that it opened to her a prospect of guidance and support, such as no other circumstances could have presented. And thus she remained in her father's house, to some an object of strange interest, to some of enthusiastic admiration, to all perhaps of a nameless compassion ; for all felt that her lot differed in some ways from that of others ; that there was a cloud

resting upon her—Walter Sydney called it a halo, so mild was the light of her eye, so pure was the tenour of her life. Margaret alone had seen that cloud gather, and knew the dark source from whence it rose ; but even when it had weighed on that shrinking head, her own heart had whispered that it was laden with misery, and not with shame. Her own wild spirits, her childish glee, her thoughtless prattle altered. She seemed to view life differently from what she had hitherto done. Her own disappointment, the weight of a secret, gratitude for the quiet and spotless course of her own life, seemed to deepen and to strengthen her character. Then Walter Sydney's lessons began to tell, and the peculiarity of such an affection as his to strike her. The glimpse that had been given her of life, and of its miseries, had sobered, without chilling the ardour of her spirit ; she seemed to discover that such an attachment as his, whatever its exact nature might be, was a treasure of inesti-



mable value; and in her manner, with the same artless confidence as before, mingled a respectful tenderness which it had not yet evinced. A few months thus elapsed, and then Colonel Leslie informed his daughters that he had taken a house in London, and that in a few days they would remove there for some time.

## CHAPTER XIII.

It was on a beautiful evening in the beginning of May, that Margaret Leslie walked slowly up the winding ascent, bordered with evergreens, which led towards Heron Castle. The delicate colours of the lilac and laburnum contrasted with the dark shining laurel leaves; the blossoms of the lime-trees perfumed the breeze, while the guelder roses spread beneath them a snowy shower of white petals. The rays of the setting sun came slanting through the spreading branches of the horse-chestnuts, and the birds were making that short and joyous twitter—that carol of glee—which rises from one bush, and then is answered from the recesses of another, taken up by the little tenants of some lofty branch, and then

re-echoes before, behind, above us, in one clamorous concert of exulting melody. As Margaret went on she sometimes gathered a flower, and added it to those she already held in her hand, or she stopped before a lilac bush, of a deeper, bluer purple, than the rest, and bending over the fragrant branches revelled in their sweetness; sometimes she paused as an opening in the trees presented a view in the valley through which the Grant was flowing, and beyond which rose the woods and the grey walls of her own beloved home. It was a Sunday evening, and the sound of distant church-bells came floating on the air with a deep-toned harmony which suited the scene and the hour. The low, distant bark of the house-dogs, that peculiarly English sound, accorded with it also; and the whistle of some stroller in the fields below added to the sensation of grateful rest—of permitted and blessed repose—which stole over the heart on that Sabbath eve. It

brought to Margaret's mind some simple lines which, in her childhood, she used often to say and she repeated them now with the fondness with which we cling to any form of words that has ever translated for us the emotions of our heart—

“Is there a time when moments flow  
More peacefully than all beside ?—  
It is, of all the times below,  
A Sabbath eve in summer tide.”

The last word was on her lips when Walter met her, and drawing her arm within his, returned with her towards the Castle.

“This is very kind of you, dearest Margaret,” he said. “I was going to Grantley, but this is far better. Where is Ginevra ? ”

“She parted with me at the foot of the hill, to go to the little chapel at Heron. It is the hour for what she calls the Benediction. It is a beautiful name for a religious service ; but, in gazing on that pure sky, and at these divine works of God, I, too, feel as if I received a Bene-

diction; and to-night," she added with some emotion, "to-night it would seem a parting blessing, for I shall not spend another Sunday at home."

Walter did not answer, but pressed her hand again as they crossed the flower-garden, which lay on the west side of the building, and advanced towards an open window where his mother was sitting. Mrs. Sydney's pale, thin features were lighted up at that moment by the rays of the setting sun; and the peculiar hue which this circumstance imparted to her black dress, her close cap, her very white hands, the large Bible in which she was reading, and the vase of flowers by her side, gave her the appearance of one of Rembrandt's portraits.

"How beautiful your mother looks at this moment," whispered Margaret to Walter. He smiled faintly and said,

"Yes; she has the peculiar beauty which

belongs to old age. It speaks of peace in this life, and a hope beyond."

"Dear Mrs. Sydney," Margaret gently said, as she approached the window, and placed herself on the broad ledge between it and the garden.

"Your old place, darling: welcome to it on this sunny evening. You are a gude sight for sair e'en, as old Andrew says whenever he catches a glimpse of you. But you are not come to say good bye, are you?"

"No, not that exactly, but to spend my last Sunday evening with you."

"Aye, you have done that for seventeen years, I think;" and Mrs. Sydney's voice trembled a little; "and now you are going to leave us——"

"For a few months," Margaret replied, absently, and fixed her eyes on Walter's face. He smiled in answer to her glance, but the smile only stayed there while she looked: it faded away immediately, and he turned towards the gate, and walked slowly towards the conservatory.

“Walter does not look well,” Margaret said in a low voice.

Tears which had been on the point of starting before this remark, rolled slowly down Mrs. Sydney’s check. Margaret, as she had often done when a child, hastily jumped into the room, sat down on the side of Mrs. Sydney’s arm-chair, and putting her arm round her neck, said—

“*Is* not Walter well?”

“He is not ill, dear child.”

“Then why does *he* look ill, and why are *you* unhappy?”

“Only a little dull, perhaps,” said Mrs. Sydney, trying to smile, and effecting nothing but a slight quivering in the corner of her mouth.

“Mrs. Sydney, look at me. Now look at me.”

Margaret had changed her position, and was sitting on a stool before the old lady. She had got hold of both her hands, and was gazing into

her face with a mixture of tenderness and gravity, just modified by the least little degree of sauciness, which made her more irresistibly captivating than ever.

“Now, look at me, Mrs. Sydney, full in the face; and now, Mrs. Sydney, speak the truth, and tell me what it is that makes Walter unhappy.”

“He is not unhappy, love.”

“He *is* unhappy,” retorted Margaret, vehemently, “and so are you!—and so am I—if you will not speak.”

“Why, dearest child, what can I say? You know how much we all love you, and you are going, and then—”

“And then, what?”

“And then, when you are in London, you will—see people you will like—who will like you—and then you will marry—and Walter will be very glad—”



“ Oh ! Walter will be very glad, will he ? ” and Margaret drew one of her namesakes from the vase of flowers before her, and as she pulled the red and white leaves alternately, repeated mechanically to herself the old French charm, “ *Je vous aime un peu, beaucoup passionnement pas du tout.* ” While Mrs. Sydney went on in broken sentences—

“ He says you ought to marry—and that you will marry—and that we ought to wish it—and that Mr. Neville is now so rich, and his own master—and if you meet Mr. Neville in town—and then we shall be very glad you know, darling; but you will only come here sometimes—once a year, perhaps—and that makes us feel a little dull, and sorry, perhaps—and—”

“ Mrs. Sydney, will you tell Walter—will you please to tell Walter—that I shall never marry Mr. Neville. Whatever else may happen, that never can be.”

“Why not, darling?” asked Mrs. Sydney, with a little more animation of manner, and looking at the flushed and beautiful face that was lifted up to hers.

“Because I would rather marry any one in the world now, than him.”

“Even Walter himself, perhaps,” said a voice at the window.

Margaret started; Mrs. Sydney quivered; it was her husband’s voice; his touch was one which she dreaded on all matters of feeling, and he had now alluded to a subject which, beyond all others, she would have wished to withdraw from his grasp.

“*Even* Walter!” Margaret exclaimed. “That *even* is strangely out of place when connected with Walter’s name.”

“Why, you would not marry that fanciful old gentleman, would you?”

Mrs. Sydney’s hands trembled as she wiped her spectacles, and said, in a low voice—

“Oh, Margaret, never joke on this subject.”

Margaret pressed her hand, and with a bright colour in her cheek, and an earnest expression in her eyes, said to Mr. Sydney—

“If Walter’s affection for me was not that of a brother for the most childish and troublesome of sisters, I can scarcely tell how I should answer your question. As it is, it requires no answer. There : I am come to the last leaf of my *Marguerite*, and to the last bit of nonsense I shall talk to-night.”

A deep sigh from Mrs. Sydney caught her ear, and a murmured “Thank you, love !” followed it, as her husband walked on, with his hands in his pockets, and his back to the window.

“And if I am not to joke on this subject,” said Margaret, timidly, and resting her head against Mrs. Sydney’s knees, “may I know why ? Yes, you are crying ; I knew you were ;” she continued, as the old woman’s tears fell fast on her

head; "and that is right—for to have a grief, and not to tell it, is a bitter thing—sad and bitter."

"Sad, but not bitter in some hearts," exclaimed the mother. "Oh no; not bitter in his. In mine sometimes, perhaps—I have so passionately wished him to be happy!"

"Not more than I do," Margaret said in a low voice.

Mrs. Sydney stooped and kissed her forehead. Margaret flung her arms round her neck, put her mouth close to her ear, and murmured—

"Would he be happy if I married him?" and then hid her burning cheeks on the neck of the astonished and agitated mother.

"Oh, Margaret! my child! my dear child! what have I said?—what have I done? It has been very wrong—he will say so. O, he must never know."

Margaret raised her head, and a bright smile passed over her face, as she said—

“Then how can we make him happy, if we never tell him?”

“O, but my child! it cannot be! It is not true—my head is quite confused. I am sure I have done something very wrong. Walter will never forgive me.”

“What—he?” said Margaret, with another saucy smile. “But tell me, now that we mean to make him happy—tell me how unhappy he has been, and when it began?”

“O, Margaret!” cried Mrs. Sydney, with increasing emotion, “he has loved you from your cradle—he has adored you through your childhood—he has worshipped the ground you trod in thoughtless glee, and his whole existence has been one continual thought of you. I saw, not long ago, that the iron had entered into his soul: it was when the cloud first darkened your brow. ‘I can bear anything but that,’ he one day said, and I know he felt it.”

The colour deepened on Margaret's check, as her own recent sufferings were alluded to. The wound was lately healed, and a shade of sadness passed over her features. She had committed herself more, perhaps, than if it was to Walter himself that she had held out the hopes which her words must have awakened in his mother's heart. She longed to be alone and to think. She felt suddenly frightened at the idea of seeing him again; she was not quite sure on what account; and when the door opened and Walter came in, her heart beat violently.

He sat down by her, and spoke in a quiet cheerful manner of her approaching absence, of her journey to London, and of the care he should take meanwhile of all that interested her at home. She gave him a long letter to read, which she had received that day from one of her village *protégés*, and asked his opinion upon it. It was from a young orphan girl, in whose history they had

both felt much interest. She had been crossed in love, as she expressed it herself, and deserted some months before by a young man, whose rank in life was somewhat above her own; and now she was urged by a neighbouring farmer to accept his hand. Riddell (that was his name) had loved her all along, she said, and she could find it in her heart to marry him, but she was doubtful still, and in many minds about it, and would take it as a favour if Miss Leslie would just advise her what to do. Whilst Walter was reading this letter, Margaret leant back in her chair, and looked at him with a sort of strange complacent curiosity. There was something very peculiar in the mixture of care-worn thoughtfulness, and yet of deep serenity, which marked his countenance. The lines about his eyes and brow were strongly marked, and seemed to bear the traces of suffering; but his mouth, on the contrary, had an expression of repose and sweetness somewhat

peculiar in a person of his age. His hair was black, and very slightly tinged with grey ; it grew thickly on the sides of the head, but left the brow and the temples discovered. She gazed on that pale thoughtful countenance, and connected its expression with the many scenes of past life, which were now rising in her mind's eye, and remembered, with emotion, how much he must have borne, endured, and suffered, if, indeed, he loved her not as a brother, but as a lover. A lover! —she started almost visibly as the word crossed her brain. It seemed to her almost wrong to think of Walter as a lover, and he was so very unlike him who not long ago had held that character in her eyes. She shrank from that name, and felt frightened at shrinking. She would not willingly see him at her feet, or hear from him those words of love which she had longed to hear from Neville's lips ; but she would readily place her hand in his, and walk by his



side through life with a grateful heart and a hopeful spirit. He raised his eyes from the letter at that moment, and said—

“What advice would you give to this girl?”

“About this *marriage de raison*, do you mean?”

“Yes,” he answered; “do you think she would be justified in marrying, without more love than she seems to feel for poor Riddell?”

“That depends upon what Riddell expects.”

“True! but if he is satisfied with the grateful attachment she feels for him—which she describes herself as feeling?”

“If he is, I am,” said Margaret, with a smile. “You are not romantic about your *protégés*, I see.”

“That depends on what you term *romance*. Anny may find, in the depths of her own heart, a deeper interest for one who has loved her with the real romance of unrequited affection, than in the feverish dream which has haunted her imagination, rather than touched her feelings.”

Walter looked at Margaret, and saw that her eyes were full of tears, and his mother rose at that moment and left the room. He folded the letter slowly; a kind of vague strange hope—an unnatural hope, it seemed to him—a sort of vision which almost scared him, so unreal did it appear—hovered before him.

“Margaret,” he said, at last, “Margaret! do you really think that such an affection as you allude to—a devoted ardent attachment, sprung up unconsciously, unconsciously nursed, blended with every hour of a man’s life, deepened by every trial, mingled with every emotion of his soul—a love, that as soon as he suspected it, he struggled with, despaired of overcoming, and then exalted into a devotion which knew no hope, and looked for no return—do you mean that it would not seem to you impossible, that strangely, suddenly, in an unexpected hour, that love should win back love at last?”

Margaret's tears were rolling slowly down her cheeks, but a smile was also on her lips, as she said, with her own peculiar tone of childish playfulness—

“Are you talking of Riddell now, Old Walter?” and she laid her hand on his.

He started, and said rapidly—

“Tell me, dearest Margaret, for mercy's sake tell me, do you understand me?—do I understand you, or have I been talking nonsense?—thinking aloud? It is all over now,” he said with an effort, and then added, with a mournful smile, “I must have been dreaming, I think.”

She pressed his hand, and one of those bright tears fell upon it.

“O Margaret, do not be sorry for me—if I have said too much, and that you have guessed the truth——do not be sorry for me; do not let a single thought of pain or of embarrassment disturb your gentle kindness, my precious Margaret,

my own dear child! There are feelings which have their own reward, and if I do indeed love you, as never perhaps did any one love another before, this is happiness in itself, and enough for me. That I have suffered I will not deny; but I have now seen you calm and bright again, as if no cloud had ever darkened your peaceful life. I have seen you turn with courage and patience to all the home duties and sacred charities of life. I have seen that trial has purified without hardening your heart, and I am grateful, deeply grateful, Margaret, and full of hope for the future —— for your future happiness —— for your ——”

He stopped, for Margaret's arms were round his neck, and she was telling him, in a voice that would have been scarcely audible to any ears but his—that she loved him better than any one in the world; that she had sometimes thought so; that she was sure of it now. His heart was beating so violently that he could scarcely utter,

but he subdued his own agitation to calm hers. He took her hand between his, and led her to the window. The shades of evening had fallen, and a few stars were beginning to shine on the face of the darkening skies. The beautiful river, like a silver ribbon, was reflecting in its bosom the rays of the moon, and not a breath of air disturbed the silence of the scene. For an instant they were also silent, and then Walter spoke; his voice belied the calmness of his manner: it was trembling with emotion.

“ If I said just now, my Margaret, that in loving you I had had my share of earthly happiness, judge if this hour has not filled its measure. If no other joy was ever to be mine during the remainder of my life, than the memory of this, I could not complain. But listen to me, Margaret. From my soul, I thank you! With my whole heart, I bless you! I cannot love you more than I have done. It is not in man’s

power to love with more fervour, with more entire devotion ; but more, yet more than ever, my life, my fate, my existence, will be in your hands ; and to be to you all that father, brother, husband, in one, can be, in life, and till death, is my prayer, and I can scarcely believe it when I speak the word, it is now my *hope*. But, Margaret, listen to my firm, my unalterable resolution, formed even in this moment of overpowering happiness, and which, so help me God ! I will keep. You shall not marry your Old Walter—you shall not give your youth, your beauty, your heart to him—you shall not bind yourself by irrevocable ties, till you have tried and tested your own feelings, and learned the full value of that priceless gift. O my beloved child ! tell no one of the hope you have given me. Let not the world, or any human being, ever venture to interfere or judge, if the day should come when, with the same adorable simplicity with which you

have offered to intrust your happiness to my keeping, you should come to me and say— ‘Walter, I was mistaken. You *may*, you *must* love me still, but not in the way we once thought of.’ A silent pressure of the hand, a struggle, a prayer, and the dream would be at an end. This short life would be more sad, doubtless, and the thought of another more precious still than before; but none would know the trial, or the consolations of that hour, but yourself and me. Promise me this, Margaret!”

“And how long is my trial to last, you suspicious old Walter? I think I have done something very like proposing to you, and I am not quite sure I have not been refused in a very pretty sentimental manner.”

Now, for the first time, Walter smiled, and the full tide of happiness seemed to rush over his heart.

“If in a year,” he said; “if, after having spent

several months in London, after having questioned your own heart—”

“ O yes, I shall question it a great deal, and I know what it will answer ; and if in a year’s time I am in the same mind, you will consent to make me your wife ? Is that it ? I am very much obliged to you indeed, dear Walter, for the promise, though it is a new kind of thing that you should be the one to stipulate for delay. You must propose to me in form when the time comes, and perhaps kneel on one knee too, and write me some verses, and do all sorts of things of that kind. O Walter, why did we never think of this before ? ” she exclaimed, with a sort of childish impetuosity ; and then checking herself, as she saw an intense emotion pass over his face, while in a low voice he repeated—“ Never thought of it ! ”—she added, seriously, “ I might have. If we had not opened our hearts to each other to-day, I might still have misunderstood my own feelings.”



Long did they talk of the past—earnest was the confidence—intimate the communications of thought and feeling between them. The great clock of the castle struck ten before they turned from that window; and Margaret, with her bonnet and cloak on, rushed into the little drawing-room, where Mr. Sydney was asleep in his arm-chair, and Mrs. Sydney watching for every sound and step; she kissed the pale thin cheek of Walter's mother, and murmured in her ear—

“He will forgive you ; don't be afraid.”

When she reached home she found Ginevra in the library playing some sacred music to her father. She glided gently into the room and placed herself near to her. The beautiful notes of Pergolesi's “Stabat Mater” fell on her ear, and a ray of moonlight through the open window showed her her sister's face. It was in expression like what a painter would have assigned to the “Mother of Sorrows,” and her thrilling voice

seemed to reveal that she herself was "with sorrows heaviest weight oppressed," but supported under it by a more than human power. The sight of that meek suffering, of that calm desolation, affected Margaret more deeply than usual, from the contrast it afforded to the newly-acquired happiness which filled her own heart. But even then, perhaps, in the midst of suffering, and lonely suffering, there was a principle of strength and of consolation in the younger sister's heart, which was not fully understood by the other. That evening, at the same time, both had raised their eyes to heaven, and both had felt as if a blessing, *a benediction*, had descended on their heads. On one, the bright face of nature had smiled; its glorious hues, its perfumes, and its songs, had spoken a blessing from the skies, and that evening hour had brought her a promise of happiness, the purest that earth can yield. The other had received a benediction from the altar, where she

had knelt in the immediate presence of God, and she rose with the promise that none but God can make good—that suffering itself may be a pledge of mercy, a source of blessing, an earnest of heaven.

Margaret drew near to the piano as her sister finished the plaintive but glorious strain, and passing her arm round her neck, whispered—

“Ginevra, I *am* happy; would to Heaven that you were so too!”

A flash of joy passed over the pale face of the youngest sister.

“O mother of mercies!” she exclaimed, “thou hast pleaded and obtained!”

She passed her arms round Margaret’s waist, and looked up tenderly into her face, while she said in the lowest whisper—

“Walter?” Margaret stopped her mouth with a kiss, and hurried away.

A few days after, the whole family left Grantley

for London, and it was settled between Walter and Margaret that he should follow them to town as soon as he had finished the arrangement of some affairs in the neighbourhood, in which his father was essentially concerned.

## CHAPTER XIV.

COLONEL LESLIE'S sister, Mrs. Wyndham, was a widow, and one of those persons whom most people like, without exactly being able to assign a reason, for she was rather too much engrossed with worldly amusements to suit the thoughtful in character, and the strict in principle. She was not wise or witty, or quiet enough to be an agreeable, or even wholly untroublesome member of society. She was not kind enough to put herself much out of the way for the sake of others, nor generous enough to render them very important services. But she was always in good spirits, always glad to see her friends, always ready to promote their pleasures. She had a pleasant laugh, an undisturbable good humour, an agreeable way of shak-

ing hands, exceedingly comfortable arm-chairs, nice books, with paper-cutters in them, on her tables, enough of luxury in her house for enjoyment, and not too much for show. She never said disagreeable things to people, nor of them to others, except to those to whom it happened at the moment to be peculiarly acceptable. She had not been often at Grantley, and of her brother had hardly ever seen anything since the days of their early youth. She was delighted, however, at the idea of his coming to town, and complained with rapture of the fatigue it would be to take out her two nieces. She told everybody that they were *coming out*, and that girls were so unmerciful at first in their exactions about sitting up at balls, that she expected to be quite knocked up before the end of the year. Maud Vincent, to whom she was holding forth on the subject, could scarcely repress a smile as she thought of the two sisters, and especially the pale Ginevra, being supposed to

pine for a succession of London balls ; but she, too, felt an intense impatience for their arrival. No subject had ever excited her curiosity so much as the state of feeling in that family, and she longed to observe the attitude of those two sisters in society.

She spoke of them to everybody she met ; announced Margaret as an heiress, and Ginevra as a genius, and took every opportunity of hinting that the latter was a very extraordinary person, and that women found it very difficult to get on with her. About the end of May the Leslies arrived, were established in London, and delivered up to Mrs. Wyndham's guardianship, who was enchanted at having pretty girls to take out, as the beggars rejoice in borrowing squalid children. If she could not have had them for nothing, she would gladly have hired them. None had ever answered to her before, as well as the Leslies, for they excited in London society what is described

in the French newspapers when they speak of the Chamber of Deputies,—at first, *attention*, and then, *sensation*. They were both so pretty, and yet so very different, that the names of the Lily and the Rose were spontaneously bestowed upon them. Both were perfectly refined, and the most fastidious ear or taste could not have pointed out a gesture or a word that could have offended their nicest susceptibility; but at the same time, they were both in their different ways original, and as unlike the common type of girls, as a young mountain ash and an Indian palm would be in the midst of a plantation of pollard willows. The secret circumstances which accompanied the appearance of both in the world, contributed to this peculiarity. They were very young, and everything was new to them but the deep emotions of the heart. They had both had experience in suffering, though in different degrees; but in other ways they were as artless as children. Margaret



was pleased with the world as she had been at seven years old with a toy-shop. Sights, music, plays, dancing, admiration, homage, all seemed to her a brilliant show, in which she performed her part with the eagerness with which a child would fire off rockets, or ride in a turn-about ; and the unceasing gaiety of the young heiress, and the courteous, merry, careless indifference with which she received all the adulation which she met with, strangely puzzled those that felt an interest in solving the problem. One man said to another—

“Do you think that little Leslie has a hard heart, or a cold heart, or a pre-engaged heart?”

“Perhaps she has no heart at all,” answered his friend, listlessly, while he spied at her as if she might be an anatomical curiosity.

It was very different with Ginevra. The world to her was no empty show, no mere pageant, through which she moved with happy and careless indifference. As in her own heart, she felt a

deep and agitating principle at work under the calm and even surface, so in the visible world, under its listless joys, and its tame exterior, her observant eye and keen spirits discovered the strivings of passion and the workings of the soul. She had not, like Margaret, lodged her heart in a place of safety, and from that secure resting-place glanced on the world as on a tournament, whose gay combatants rose and fell before her, without exciting anything but a smile; that world to her was the battle-field of life, the scene of a struggle on which her earthly happiness depended. There was not a woman who passed her in those crowded assemblies who might not one day be a rival, and court that love which was her right and her due. There was not a word uttered in those gay theatres, at those long dinners, in those dull morning visits, which did not make some secret anxiety swell, or some chord vibrate in her own breast. Often Edmund's name was uttered by some careless

speaker—for he was rich, young, free, as they thought; and the good expressed hopes, and the worldly formed speculations, and the bad sneered, in the hearing of the trembling wife, whose colour rose and fell, and whose heart throbbed with violence during, what seemed to others, the most insignificant conversation. She was more beautiful than ever; and it was not only admiration that her presence called forth,—there were some whose feelings were roused to a degree that astonished themselves, by the strange fascination that Ginevra Leslie exercised. Cold and reserved in her manner, she gave no encouragement to those who addressed her in the language of love; but the varying colour in her cheek, the cloud of emotion which seemed to obscure the serene azure of her eyes, when any expression of the sort was uttered in her presence, excited and rivetted the interest she inspired. And cold as she was when made the object of direct attentions, there were moments

when, through subjects of abstract discussion, her reserve seemed for an instant to give way, and the flashes of genius gave a momentary glimpse into the depths which that calm exterior habitually concealed. As she grew conscious of her own powers of captivation, and felt the influence which her beauty and her eloquence exercised on the crowd of admirers who surrounded her, she wondered in secret at the strangeness of her fate, and a painful smile, one of those smiles which, according to the character of the face over which they pass, are either bitterly scornful or inexpressibly mournful, flitted over her features, as she thought of the destiny which was forced upon her by one to whom she had given that love which others were so earnestly and so vainly striving to obtain. She became at once the idol of that world in which she had suddenly appeared. Her foreign appearance, joined to her peculiar manners, and her still more peculiar talents, combined in exciting a

general interest, and it was impossible that she should not feel the contrast between the homage she received, and the admiration she inspired, and the bitter and miserable destiny which her husband assigned to her ; but the love and devotion of others, instead of healing, seemed but to deepen the wounds which her heart had received ; and when bursts of admiration and murmurs of applause attended some brilliant exercise of her talents ; when, with the enthusiasm of genius, and the simplicity of manner which belonged to her, she had electrified her hearers by some incomparable strain of melody, or by an improvisation, in which thought seemed to hurry on language with a startling and resistless impetuosity, she would return to her place, and sit in silence with one image before her eyes, and only value the praises resounding in her ears, as tributes to be one day laid at the feet of her undeserving husband.

The more Margaret's attention was directed to her sister, the more earnestly she watched her manners and her conduct, the more confirmed she felt in her conviction that there was something very extraordinary in her history. She never could detect the slightest indication in her manner, of anything that would have justified Maud's impression of her character, or that would have tallied with the glaring impropriety of conduct which she had herself detected on that memorable morning at Grantley; and it was with almost as much emotion as Ginevra, that she heard, in casual conversation, that Edmund Neville was expected in town, in the course of the following week. The weather was become intensely hot, and London was crowded to excess. Both sisters were fatigued with the exertions of the last few days, and Margaret was annoyed at the delay in Walter's arrival. He wrote that he was still delayed in the country by business; but in her

secret heart she thought that this prolonged absence betokened a too confident security, and she said to herself, that, after all, he ought not to be quite so "*sur de son fait*," and leave her for so many weeks, without looking after her proceedings. She might have fallen in love with ever so many people, who had been making up to her ; and when she received another letter again indefinitely putting off his arrival, it just occurred to her, that, perhaps, she would flirt a little, very little, but just enough to vent the irritation which this intelligence had produced.

There was to be that evening a party at Mrs. Wyndham's, to which her nieces had promised to come early ; her house looked on Hyde Park, and the windows were all thrown open to catch the faint breezes which now and then stirred the muslin curtains, among which vases of flowers and coloured lamps were arranged. There were very few people arrived when Colonel Leslie and

his daughters entered the room ; but Margaret's rapid glance soon discerned a young man whose face was familiar to her, from having repeatedly met him, during the last few weeks, without having as yet ascertained his name. He was in deep mourning, and his grave and mild countenance had somewhat arrested her attention. He seemed to take very little part in society, and yet they had scarcely been to a single ball or party without seeing him, and especially remarked how frequently his eyes were fixed on Ginevra. She had come to the conclusion that he must be a timid admirer of her sister's, and it rather amused her to watch this kind of mute devotion, on the part of the silent young man. She wished to ask Mrs. Wyndham what his name was, but as she was busy receiving her guests, she could not obtain her attention, and both sisters sat down together on a couch opposite to the window. Sir Charles d'Arcy (one of the young men who had



spent some days at Grantley in the winter) left the balcony, and placed himself on a chair, next to the sofa. He nodded to the silent young man, who looked up from a book of prints he was examining, and nodded also with a good-humoured smile. By degrees he took part in the conversation that was going on between the sisters and Sir Charles, and Margaret observed that he seemed particularly anxious to catch every word that fell from Ginevra's lips. After some insignificant remarks, Sir Charles said to the stranger,

“Have you heard from Anne, lately?”

“Yes,” he answered: “I believe she will be in town in a few days.”

“To meet Edmund, I suppose, then.”

Margaret looked at her sister, and so did the stranger, and all three coloured deeply.

“He has been at Paris all this time—has not he?” again asked Sir Charles.

“Yes,” said the unknown, with his eyes still

fixed upon Ginevra: "spending a great deal of money, I am told, and leading a very gay life."

"Any matrimonial project *en l'air*?"

"There have been reports of the kind, I believe; but," he added, after a pause, "I do not believe them to be true."

"Who do they name?" said Ginevra, in so low a voice that no one heard her. "Who do they speak of?" she repeated, in so loud a tone that this time the question startled her neighbour.

"O! Mrs. Fraser, the beautiful widow that people talk of so much."

"Would Miss Neville approve?" inquired Sir Charles d'Arcy.

"I don't know," answered the unknown, without this time raising his eyes from his book.

Mrs. Wyndham at that moment joined them, and said carelessly,

"O, are you speaking of that tiresome Edmund Neville? He has just written to put off his coming

again, and it quite spoils a little plan of mine, for I had reckoned upon him."

"What is that?" said another young man.

"Our Play," said Mrs. Wyndham; "I want him to act. You know it is for a charity, and that every one ought to help us who can."

"Does he act well?" asked Sir Charles.

"O, yes!" Margaret said; and then added, as if to herself, "and more parts than one."

The silent young man bent his head down over the book, and said, in so low a voice that she only heard, and only just heard it,

"Have you any reasons for saying so?"

Margaret's eyes met his, and both again coloured deeply. He rose immediately, and she proposed to Ginevra to move into the next room. As they passed Lucy Vincent, who was sitting at the tea table, Margaret stopped and asked her who was the young man who was standing in the doorway, speaking to Sir Charles d'Arcy.

“O, that is Mr. Charles Neville; he is a cousin of your friend Mr. Neville, and engaged to marry his sister, I believe. Don’t you know him?”

Margaret felt her sister’s arm tremble within hers, and both moved into the balcony, where the air was cooler, and the lights less glaring. They sat there alone for a few minutes.

Margaret’s thoughts wandered to the terrace of Heron Castle, to the flower garden of Grantley, to the old library where Walter sat and read while she played to him; she thought of his love and of his kindness, and smiled to herself as she remembered the revenge she had planned—how fatiguing it would be to flirt with others—how soothing it was to think of him. Meanwhile, where were Ginevra’s thoughts during that instant of silence? Her lips were tightly drawn together, and tears were gathering in her eyes. Her heart was sick with hope deferred—it was sore with a new anxiety—it felt too bruised to

meet a coming struggle. She laid her forehead one moment on her sister's shoulder, as if to rest her aching brow. The rustling of a curtain behind them startled her, and turning round she saw Charles Neville standing close to her. He sat down on a chair by her side, and said, in a kind manner,

"I am afraid you are very tired, Miss Leslie."

She nodded assent, and said,

"Have you seen the Warrens lately?"

"No; are they in town?"

"Not that I know of."

"They are great friends of yours, are they not?"

"They have been very kind to me. I have a great regard for Mr. Warren."

"Have you been long in England?" she inquired, feeling a strange pleasure in speaking to a near relation of Edmund's, and of hearing names of people and places which were connected with him.

“Yes; I left Clantry about six weeks ago. It was hard to leave it in all its spring beauty. It is such a lovely place. You have heard the Warrens speak of it, I suppose?”

“I have often heard of it,” she replied.

“You know Edmund Neville, don’t you?” said her companion, with some embarrassment.

She had never been asked that question before, and it produced a strange impression upon her.

“Yes; I know him,” she slowly answered; and the crimson colour rose in her cheek as she spoke.

“He is at Paris, you know?”

This had been said before her already, and Charles Neville was aware of it. Why did he repeat it now? She darted upon him a quick glance of inquiry, which he met by a piercing gaze, which intended to read into her thoughts, fell as if the very expression of her eyes, the hurried sigh that escaped her, might ruin Edmund.

Faint and giddy, she snatched a glass of water from a passing tray, and then, in as indifferent a tone as she could command, inquired,

“When was it you said that Mr. Neville was expected in town?”

“His sister hopes to meet him next week, but it seems uncertain, from Mrs. Wyndham’s account, whether his arrival will not be again postponed. Miss Neville,” he added with hesitation, “will be anxious to make your acquaintance—she has heard so much of you from—”

He paused, and Ginevra fixed upon him her eyes with an almost expression of surprise and of fear, and he added hastily,

“From the Warrens, you know.” He then talked of other things, and soon after walked away.

Ginevra turned to Margaret to propose returning home, but saw that she was engaged in an animated conversation with Frederick Vincent;

all appearance of listlessness and fatigue had disappeared from her countenance, but, as they talked, her manner grew more earnest, and her expression more thoughtful. She seemed annoyed when Colonel Leslie made a sign from the door that he wished to go ; and while they were putting on their cloaks in the hall, Ginevra heard her sister say, in a low voice, to Frederick Vincent,

“ When shall you come back ? ”

“ On the night of the play,” he said, “ and in the meantime speak to Lucy ; she knows all about it.”

As they passed before his two sisters she saw that Maud looked significantly at her brother and at Margaret, and said something in a low voice to Lucy. Ginevra thought of Walter, and a painful fear crossed her mind as she stepped into the carriage ; Margaret heard the deep sigh that escaped her, and looked anxiously into her face.



“What is it, Ginevra?” she whispered, struck with her more than usual paleness.

“Nothing, dearest,” she answered faintly.

“Ah, never anything else,” retorted Margaret impatiently—“*On se brise contre cette glace*”—and leaning back in the corner she closed her eyes, and did not speak again that night.

During the next ten days both sisters appeared equally restless, and equally reserved in conversation; at the same time each felt, and in her manner evinced, an anxious solicitude about the other. Each day that passed without bringing any intelligence of Edmund’s arrival, heightened Ginevra’s disquietude to such a degree, that she could only preserve her calmness by efforts that nothing would have enabled her to make but an early acquired and long continued habit of self-command. Her courage never threatened to give way, except when she anticipated a state of things that would obscure the view she took of her line of

duty, and now this danger seemed impending. Sometimes she asked herself if she ought not at once to break the silence which her husband had imposed upon her, open her heart, and reveal her history to her father, and brave all the consequences of such a step ; but the fear of driving Edmund to despair, of banishing him for ever from England and from herself, compelled her to pause, and at least to see him once again, and by all the might and all the power which the justice of her cause, and the fervency of her love could give, to lead, to force him, into the paths of truth and honour. In the meantime she felt frightened at the pertinacity with which Charles Neville sought her acquaintance, and followed her steps ; and to avoid this scrutiny often turned from him abruptly, and then again sought his presence, with the hope that he might let fall a word about Edmund which would confirm or dispel her harassing doubts. She was also anxious about Margaret, who seemed unusually

absorbed and pre-occupied, and spent a great deal of time with the Vincents. She eagerly looked for Walter's arrival, and felt doubly anxious when a letter from Grantley at last accounted for his prolonged absence. A severe illness had confined him to his bed for several weeks, and he had purposely enjoined his family, and the Thorntons, to refrain from mentioning it in their letters to London, as he wished (so he expressed it to them) that Margaret's enjoyments should not be interfered with by the knowledge of his sufferings. He secretly resigned himself to this absence, from the conviction that her feelings would not be fairly tried if he was present to watch her movements, and by his presence maintain a constant appeal to an affection, the existence of which, whatever might be its nature, he could not doubt. He was resigned, but resignation is not happiness, and if Walter never indulged an impatient thought, or uttered any but kind words during that long

illness and that slow recovery ; if he smiled cheerfully when his mother tried to amuse him, and answered his father's rough raillery, or Mrs. Thornton's explanations of the exact nature of Margaret's character, and of the utter indifference, which by this time she must have attained to, and about all her friends at Grantley, it was a proof that, in the charity which beareth all things and is kind, he was a greater proficient than most people. Margaret's earnest expressions of feeling, the tears that started to her eyes as she received this account, and communicated it to Ginevra, dispelled some vague fears which the latter had conceived, and both talked of Walter, as they drove through the parks that afternoon, with an interest and a tenderness which would have done more good to his aching head, and stilled the rapid beating of his feverish pulse, as he lay on his couch, near the window, at Heron Castle, than all the Eau-de-Cologne and saline draughts which his

mother thrust upon him, or even than the globules which Mrs. Thornton occasionally produced with a tiny spoon out of a tiny bottle.

“We shall stay at home, Ginevra, to-night, shall we not?” said Margaret. “We will not go to that tiresome party at Lady Tyrrell’s. I shall like one quiet evening so much. I have never time in the day to write a really long letter to dear Walter, and I have a thousand things to tell him.—You do not want to go, do you?”

“No, dearest; while you write to Walter, I will finish altering that last scene in the translation of ‘*Simple Histoire*,’ which Mrs. Wyndham disliked. By inserting some of the beauties of the novel itself, into this translation of the French drama, it can be greatly improved. They have been rehearsing the first acts, and are impatient for the conclusion.”

As Ginevra was finishing this sentence, they

were passing through Grosvenor-gate into Park-lane. Margaret, who was reclining in the carriage, with her bonnet very much blown back by the soft west wind, and looking vacantly before her, started as she passed Grosvenor-street, and made a kind of exclamation. Her sister looked down the street, and saw Frederic Vincent, with several other young men, riding towards the Park.

“I thought Mr. Vincent was only to come back on the night of the play,” Ginevra said, as they passed him; and Margaret answered, with a look of absent pre-occupation,

“I thought so too.” She did not say another word till they reached home.

As they stood in the drawing-room, where a servant was arranging in a *jardiniere*, some flowers which they had bought at a nursery-garden, Ginevra, said—

“Had you not better write immediately to

Mrs. Wyndham, to say that we do not mean to go to Lady Tyrrell's to-night?"

Margaret appeared not to hear at first, and made a rose tree change places with an azalea, greatly to the damage of her straw-coloured gloves.

"Shall *I* write?" said Ginevra again.

"O, no! thank you," and Margaret slipped into the sofa behind the writing table, took a pen, bit the very tip of its last feather, and then, as her sister was leaving the room, called her back, and said—

"On second thoughts, I think I shall go to Lady Tyrrell's. What will you do?"

"Would you like me to go?"

"Not if you had rather stay at home."

"Then I think I will," said Ginevra, and went up to her room.

She felt depressed and anxious on Margaret's account. For a short time she had deemed her

happiness secure, and now it seemed to her that a fresh cloud, slight, indeed, as the first that rises in a summer sky, hung over a future which had seemed so serene. Colonel Leslie dined out that day, and the two sisters were again alone after dinner, and, drawing a table near the window to profit by the remaining light, and opening it wide to catch the scanty coolness of a London summer evening, they both placed before them, one her writing paper, and the other the manuscript on which she was employed. But both pens were idle, both young faces were serious. Margaret seemed absorbed in her thoughts, now and then writing a few lines, and then gazing at the lamp-lighter, as he swiftly moved from post to post, as if she felt the deepest interest in his occupation. Ginevra was writing with more perseverance, but occasionally glanced at her sister. Their eyes met, and then Margaret smiled gaily, and said—



“ How is Miss Milner getting on ? ”

“ I was not thinking of Miss Milner, I was thinking of —— ”

“ Who ? ” asked Margaret, in the same tone.

“ Miss Leslie,” said Ginevra, with a sweet but rather melancholy smile.

“ What about her ? ”

“ That I wished, oh ! how I wish that she had a sister older than herself, a sister in whom she could have confidence, whose advice she would not justly mistrust—whose own heart might open itself to her, and thus gain a right to ask for an insight into hers. One,” Ginevra continued, with increased emotion, “ who had not lost all right to warn others, except through that single claim which she possesses, Margaret, which she indeed possesses—experience in suffering.”

Tears rushed into Ginevra’s eyes as she said this. Margaret grew red, and looked at the paper before her without speaking.

“ You must think it very presumptuous of me to speak to you even in this way, Margaret ; you have been to me all tenderness, ‘ and friend to more than human friendship just.’ There has been no harshness in your words, no scorn in your eyes, and, from my soul, I feel the value of that forbearance ; and, oh ! my sister, my dearest sister ! by all I have suffered, by all I suffer every day, by all I endure and dare not speak of, listen to me, and think of what I say, before you deviate by one line from the path of truth and openness—before you complicate your duties and blind your own eyes that they may not enlighten your own heart.”

“ It would be a great advantage for us all,” answered Margaret, in a half-discontented, half-consequential manner, “ if we spoke the truth to one another. But as it seems that *that* is impossible, we must do the best we can, each in our own way.”

An expression of disappointment passed over Ginevra's face, and she took her pen again with that silent resignation which always touched Margaret. She looked at her with tenderness, then bit her lips and gazed at the ceiling; then wrote with rapidity another page of her letter; a smile played on her lips, then she grew grave again, and placing the letter on Ginevra's manuscript, said—

“ Read that.”

These were the lines she pointed to with her finger.

“ And if you ask me, dearest Walter, what I have seen most beautiful in London, I must answer, Ginevra! If you ask me what I have seen most extraordinary, I must answer, Ginevra. What most inexplicable, *her* character. What most singular, *her* position in her family and in the world. Inspiring an irresistible sympathy, and repelling its approach; attracting confidence, and never yielding it in return; capable of every

sacrifice ; ambitious of every virtue ; and yet resigned to a life without object and without interest. Dearer to me every day that we live, yet more and more estranged from me, with sorrows which none but herself can know, with joys, if she has any, with which she allows none to intermeddle. I feel tempted every hour to exclaim, ‘ Who is not a stranger to her ? ’— ‘ Would to Heaven I knew her better, or loved her less ! ’ ”

Deeply Ginevra coloured as she read this letter ; and then, to Margaret’s surprise, she tore it in pieces. This action was so unlike her usual manner, that she looked at her with inexpressible surprise.

“ Margaret,” she said, with agitation, “ you cannot speak of me in this manner, for you know more than in this letter you would appear to know. You cannot complain of my reserve, when in an hour,” her voice trembled as she spoke, “ a

dreadful hour to us both, you had a glimpse of my history, and suspected," she hid her face in her hands, "the—"

"The truth. Oh, for heaven's sake! my sister—my Ginevra—what is the truth? I can bear this silence no longer. It is a torment of every day—of every hour. Speak to me, I implore you!"

Ginevra, like all gentle people, when deeply agitated, grew almost violent in manner, under the influence of strong emotion.

"Margaret, I have told you this cannot be. This must not be. I have told you that my own weakness—that the faults of—that my faults have complicated all my duties, and gone far towards bewildering my mind; but I still know right from wrong, and the silence you reproach me with, is a sacred duty, which you must help, not thwart, me in accomplishing."

"I have never seen you thus moved," said Margaret. "Forgive me, Ginevra."

“Forgive you! Oh! Margaret, Margaret! would that I had nobody to forgive but you! Let me hold your hand on my head, for its coolness does me good. I have struggled so much; I am better now, thank you, dearest.”

At that moment a loud knock at the door announced Mrs. Wyndham’s carriage. Margaret rose hastily from her knees, on which she had sunk by her sister’s side, kissed her cheek, and hurried down stairs, murmuring to herself—“This shall not last, no, not if I have to move heaven and earth to find out the truth.” She jumped into the carriage, and found Mrs. Wyndham in an uneasy state of mind about her play; her Prima Donna was in bed with a bad cold, which had some appearance of measles, and she was in the greatest perturbation on the subject. Margaret, as she arrived at the party, hastily glanced round the room, and seeing Luey Vincent on a sofa near the chimney, immediately

went up to her. After a while, Frederic Vincent joined them, and talked to her in a low voice during the remainder of the evening.

END OF VOL. II.

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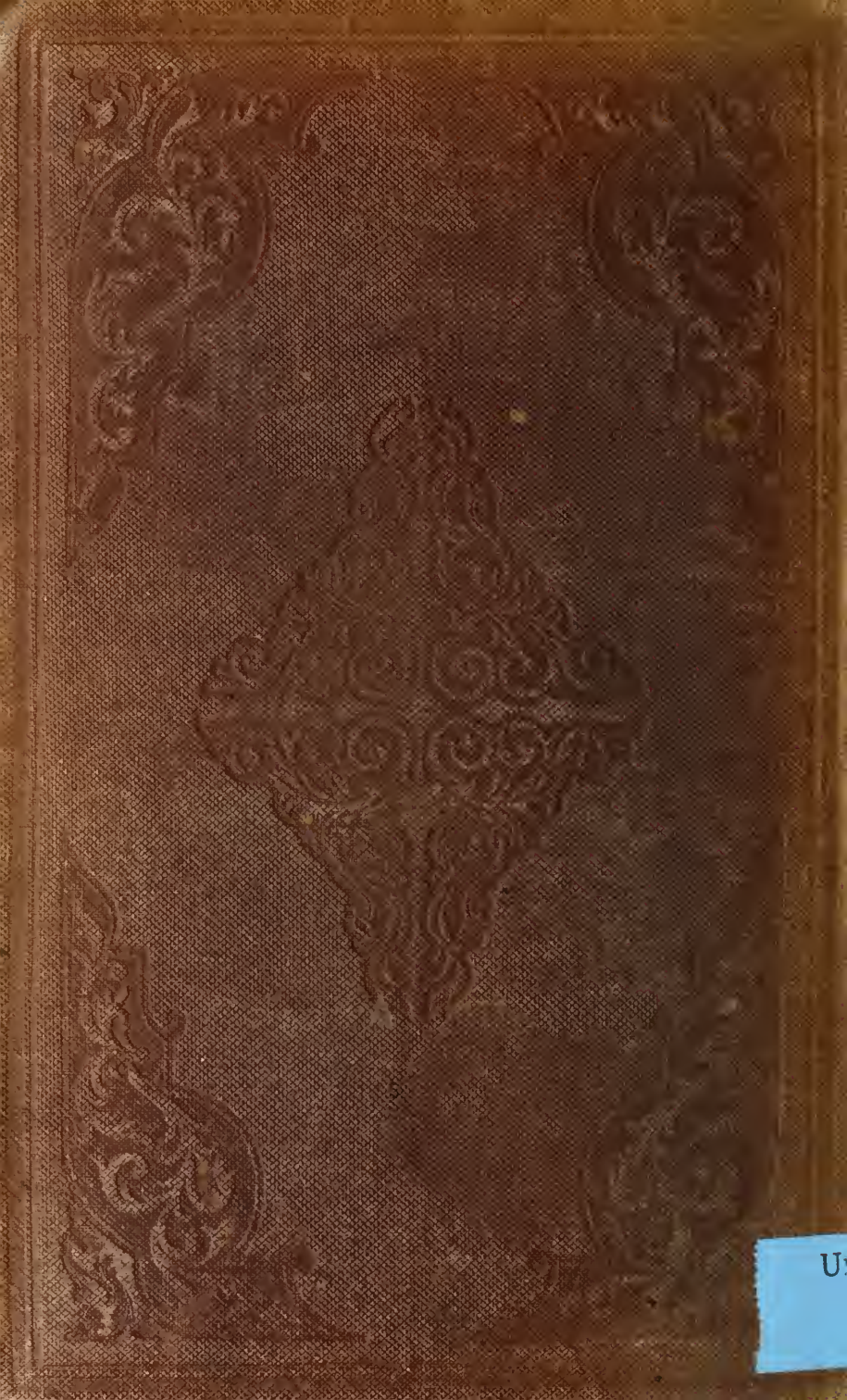
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